

MECHANISM OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN COMMUNITY TOURISM PARTICIPATORY PLANNING IN SAMUI ISLAND, THAILAND

Kannapa Pongponrat
Mahidol University

Naphawan Jane Chantradoan
Stamford International University

Community participation as a strategy for local tourism development has become an important mechanism to promote sustainable tourism. This paper explores community participatory planning process in local tourism development on Samui Island, Thailand. Factors associated with participation of local people were examined in decision-making, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation phases. Result showed social capital as a driver in various stages can be considered as crucial mechanism for the success of the planning for local tourism activities.

Keywords: Community participation, social capital, tourism planning

JEL Classification: L83, M1, O1

INTRODUCTION

Tourism significantly contributes to the economy. It is also said to create an opportunity for rejuvenation after enormous down fall from a crisis (Galdini, 2007). Moreover the study of tourism in relation to peace and harmony suggests that tourism generates a more understanding of cross-cultural issues among the locals and the tourists which therefore contributes towards overall peace (Chauhan & Khanna, 2009). But, many studies point negative and adverse consequences of mass tourism to the society specially the changes in values, systems, traditions and lifestyles (Aronsson, 2000; Guysoy, 2004). Since the environmental issue is at the highest priority in tourism development aspects, some parts of the tourism system such as the resort and lodging business are always considered the



main climate change factors (Richins & Scarinci, 2009). Further tourism could promote drug addiction, crime and prostitution (Oppermann, 1993; Jamal, 1995; Pearce, 1996; Ashley, 2001). Local people also suffer from unattractive seasonal work and inflation. Such problems are apparently due to the booming tourism sector without proper development strategy.

In Thailand, tourism plays a vital role in the socio-economic development of the country. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (2007) reported that earnings from tourism had risen steadily from USD 5.5 billion in 1996 to USD 16 billion in 2007. Tourism sector contributed 6.9% of the GDP by generating an estimated 1,946,000 jobs in Thailand representing 5.3% of country's total employment.

Samui Island is one of the best-known beach destinations in Thailand. After the tourism boom since 1970s most of the peasants of the islands changed their occupation to tourism-related businesses. But critics pointed that due to the seasonal fluctuations the tourism-related activities cannot guarantee stable growth or the self-reliance for the local communities (Singh, 1989; Voelker, 1998; ICLEI, 1999; Pongponrat, 2006). In addition, Samui Island is facing many tourism related problems such as overcrowding of beaches, traffic congestion, pollution, and drug abuses. Despite such problems, the native Samui residents have also applied community participatory approaches for local tourism development responding the local needs and problems.

In this background, this paper discusses the community participatory planning in local tourism development at various steps of planning process. It also highlights the importance of factors associated with community participation in tourism planning process. The social capital that mobilize people to make significant contributions to community participation in local tourism development has been discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Participation in planning and development program has become increasingly central to international development assistance since the 1980s with the emphasis on facilitation and pre-eminence of local knowledge (Chambers, 1983; 1997). Although participation can occur at many levels, a key objective is the incorporation of local knowledge into project's decision-making processes (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). Participation can also be considered as a process to improve decision-making (Parkins and Mitchell, 2005).

Participatory approaches require the consideration of diverse perspectives and viewpoints of different stakeholders (Gibbons, 1999).

Participation denotes the involvement of all stakeholders and creation and sustenance of accountability of the state towards the people (Tandon, 2002).

Local tourism development requires that people affected by tourism get involved in planning and implementation of policies and action plans. Such bottom-up approach could ensure that development meets the perceived need of the local community (Simpson, 2001).

Likewise, analysis of factors associated with participation is important to understand the reasons why people participate in certain activity or not. The knowledge and understanding of people, age and gender, length of membership, income, perceived benefits, self-interest, and culture and religion were the common factors associated with the intensity of participation (Sirisongkram et al., 1999; Garrod, 2003; Pattarnrakha, 2003).

Putnam (1993) considers social capital as the main mechanism to influence people to participation for community development. Plummer and FitzGibbon (2006) provide empirical evidence that social capital has an important role in the development field. Social capital could be viewed as family and kinship, structuring of class in society, social networks and connections, shared norms and trust; and consists of both structural and cognitive components (Harris and De Renzio, 1997; Woolcock, 1998; Harpham et al., 2002; Jones, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

Samui Island was selected as the study area based on the criteria: the impact of tourism development on local people; existence of participatory tourism development implemented by government, private sector, and local community; and intensity of implementation of tourism activities promoted by local government, community-based groups, and the private sector. Samui Island has a total area of 252 km² and is located in Surat Thani Province in southern Thailand (Figure 1). The Island is home to a diversity of ethnic groups that settled on the island about 15 centuries ago, and these included Thais, Malays and Chinese. Once the island developed from a coconut plantation-based industry into a major tourist destination, many people migrated to the island seeking job opportunities. The number of registered residents increased from 42,047 in 2004 to more than 50,000 additional people in 2007 (Tambon Municipality of Samui Island, 2007). Likewise, tourist arrivals in Samui Island increased from 937,763 visitors in 2004 to 1,030,623 in 2006 (TAT, 2007). In Samui Island, Na Thon community, the oldest community of Samui Island, was

selected for study considering the ongoing participatory tourism activities initiated by the Na Thon community-based group (NCBG).

In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 key informants involved in tourism development in Samui Island including: officers of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the district chief, local government officers, sub-district chief, village headman, representatives from business sectors, and the leader and committee members of NCBG.

Focus group discussions were done with three different groups: the NCBG committee and members, local people not involved in NCBG, and Samui Island's tourism related government officers. The focus groups comprised eight to ten participants. Questionnaire-based survey was done with 70 respondents selected using simple random sampling.

RESULTS

Na Thon Community-based group and tourism activities

Na Thon Community-based Group (NCBG) is an informal group and consists of 15 Committee members. NCBG create activities that allow community members to interact amongst themselves, with adjacent communities, and with tourists. They also aim to preserve the traditional local customs, which is eroding due to the rapid tourism growth. Tourism planning process was simple and flexible, and allowed several stakeholders such as local committee, villagers, and business entrepreneurs to participate. About 64.3% of the respondents were engaged in trading with an average annual income of THB 160,696 (US\$ 1 = THB 33, 2011). Slightly more than half of the respondents (55.7%) were native Samui.

NCBG has implemented various tourism development projects and activities such as community tourism calendar, a campaign to preserve buildings with old architecture and designs, and a walking-tour around the community to observe traditional architectures, and the weekend walking street initiated recently in 2009. One of the successful projects was "Pinto Dinner Fair", locally known as "Kin Kao Haoh". It is a one-day event where local people bring out their 'pinto' (tiffin carrier) to the front of their houses to share meals with their neighbours. Visitors also can taste the local food and learn about the traditional customary practices. NCBG made efforts to revive, preserve, and promote this tradition. Such Fair has served as the means of transferring knowledge and traditions to the youths.

Community Participatory Planning Process

The planning process was participatory in nature and included decision-making, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Local people could actively involve in decision-making and implementation phases, and indirectly participate in monitoring and evaluation.

The participation was induced participation with flexible process of planning whereby local people participate voluntarily. Initiating participatory planning process can be viewed as a tool to empower local people, providing them opportunities to make decisions and implement the activities based on their decisions.

Factors associated with community participation in local tourism planning process are presented in Table 1. The factors were selected to explore correlation with four dependent variables in four phases: all phases of participatory planning process, decision-making phase, implementation phase, and monitoring and evaluation phase. The findings show that seven factors had association with varying intensity of people's participation in NCBG.

Table 1: Factors Associated with People's Participation in NCBG

Factors	Correlation Coefficient (CC)			
	All Phases of Participatory Planning Process	Decision-Making Phases	Implementation Phase	Monitoring and Evaluation Phase
Level of Total Income of Respondents	0.330*	0.279*	0.310*	0.022
Degree of Benefits Gained in Capacity Building	0.296*	0.226*	0.300**	0.249*
Degree of Satisfaction with Strengthening Group Ties	0.266*	0.326**	0.311**	0.047
Degree of Benefits Gained in Increased Resource Utilization	0.232*	0.249*	0.229*	0.087
Degree of Satisfaction with Improved Planning	0.229*	0.222*	0.251*	0.014

Factors	Correlation Coefficient (CC)			
	All Phases of Participatory Planning Process	Decision-Making Phases	Implementation Phase	Monitoring and Evaluation Phase
and Management Skills				
Degree of Satisfaction with Promoting Local Tradition and Culture	0.032	0.028	0.263*	0.159
Degree of Satisfaction with Increased Productivity	0.192	0.061	0.151	0.252*

*Note: *= Significant at the 0.05 level confidence, **= Significant at the 0.01 level confidence.*

Criteria for Calculation: Correlation Coefficient (CC) less than 0.00-0.29 is a low-level correlation, 0.30-0.59 is a moderate level correlation, and more than 0.60-1.00 is a high level correlation

The qualitative analysis to analyze social capital associated with people's participation in local tourism development showed that level of education and position in the participatory group played important role in the intensity of people's participation in all phases. Majority of committee members and group members in NCBG received higher level of education. The committee members were aware of the concept of community participation and had the capacity to carry out participatory activity on behalf of the local people.

DISCUSSION

The degree of benefits gained in capacity building was one indicator associated with people's participation in participatory planning process. People participate actively if they received benefit in capacity building for themselves and for their community, and if there is an opportunity to create entrepreneurship from their participation in local tourism development. The case of NCBG showed that people were satisfied with their participation through community participatory planning as they were satisfied with the strength of group ties and better condition of living.

The degree of benefits gained in increased resource utilization has a relationship both in decision-making and implementation phases. In case of NCBG, the participatory planning process increased resource

utilization through the mobilization of local people as a group, and organizing people to pursue participatory activities to promote their local community for tourism development.

Results show that people participate actively if they were satisfied with the level of promotion of local traditions and culture through participatory activity. In case of NCBG, the participatory planning process also promoted the local traditions and culture to serve local tourism development. This factor was associated with the intensity of people's participation especially in implementation phase of "Pinto Dinner Fair". Degree of benefits gained in increased productivity also had a relationship with people's participation in monitoring and evaluation phase.

Self-interest, encouragement by local leaders, knowledge and skills, availability of time, money and materials, benefits received from participation, gender and age, communication processes, influence of culture, and interest in contributing to society are components of social capital that support active community participation. Result showed that level of education, one aspect of social capital, is important in encouraging people to participate in tourism development. In NCBG, most members of the group are native Samui with higher education (Pongponrat, 2006). Education and knowledge are perceived as supporting the thinking and broadening their vision, helping to increase their ability to plan and systematically manage activities.

Leader and leadership style are vital issues to be considered in this context, which was significantly exhibited in the NCBG. As noted by Jones (2005) power structure is an element that underpins participation process. The group's leader was former Director of Samui Hospital, well respected and trusted person by Samui residents. The leader advocated sustainable development with active involvement of local people. Thus, he persuades people to participate in NCBG activity. The power influencing participation occurred through respect and trust for the leader. It shows that social capital is embedded within structures of power and can be used to facilitate collective action for the common good (Mansuri & Rao, 2004).

In NCBG, the relationships between family members and close friends enabled creation of effective local community networks leading to a strong community bond that fitted into the concept of social organization, networking, classification of social capital, and social relationship (Putnam, 1993; Harris & De Renzio, 1997; Parkins & Mitchell, 2005).

A strong bond within the community supplemented by a great respect for their leader provided the potential to mobilize the community towards participatory planning in local tourism development. There was a close relationship among people of the group. Given their close relationships, people were willing to get involved with the group without any coercion, which led to the creation of a network. The group also gained more support from outsiders and enjoyed an increase in their power to deal with other groups. NCBG used its significant traditional lifestyle and architecture as a mechanism to increase the community's attraction to tourists.

Despite the effectiveness of community planning in tourism development people reported the lack of sufficient time to involve in community participation activities. It resulted in limited participation in the decision-making and the monitoring and evaluation phase. As a result the committee faced an overload of work for the projects.

CONCLUSION

In Samui Island, people participated in tourism development through the process of decision-making, implementation and monitoring and evaluation facilitated by leader and committee of the group. The study found that social capital components led to 'induced participation' of local people who had a strong sense of belonging to their hometown, and with mutual respect for each other, thus enabling them to work for their local tourism development. Social capital appeared significantly as the main mechanism that push and pull people to participate in their local tourism development. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis confirmed that factors associated with community participation included knowledge and leadership of trusted local people, norms and social network among community.

The case study showed potentials for a successful participatory tourism development, with strengths in the existence of local capacity to implement participatory approach with a vital role of social capital. The Na Thon case study has shown that the successful design and implementation of tourism activities depends very much on the capacities and capacity-building potentials of the local committee and their skills at leadership, organization and management of activities. Thus, co-management approach could enhance a sense of ownership and commitment of the people in the execution of various tourism development activities in the long term.

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Kannapa Pongponrat (ickannapa@mahidol.ac.th) is a Program Director of Master of Management in Tourism and Hospitality Management and a lecturer for Tourism and Hospitality Management, Mahidol University International College, Salaya Campus, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand.

Naphawan Jane Chantradoan (naphawan@stamford.edu) is a Head of Department and a lecturer for Hospitality and Tourism Department at Stamford International University, Bangkok, Thailand.