

Model of Sustainable Tourism Management to Strengthen the Communities in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This is an observation and participative action research of Shan ethnic community-based tourism of Pambok, Tham Lod, and Naplajad villages, Mae Hong Son province, Thailand. The communities still lack skills in community-based tourism to meet international tourism standards. A survey, in-depth interview, and panel discussion of 60 stakeholders were used to collect data. This research aims to analyze the problems that obstruct the management of community-based tourism, develop communities' potential to strengthen community-based tourism, and integrate a community-based tourism network to create sustainability. The results showed that the problem conditions of the three communities include the internal environment, external environment, and external environmental operations. There are also issues and obstacles to managing the community-based tourism effectively. However, all three communities firmly maintain their Shan identity in the aspects of ways of life, belief, and cultures like worshipping guardian spirit ceremony, Shan ordination, and Shan attire, and tourism resources like Kho-Gu-Soh Bamboo Merit Bridge, Lod Cave, and organic farm-stay tourism of Na Plajaad. Stakeholders from government, private, and civil society sections in community-based tourism of three areas are integrated in order to create effective and standard community-based tourism network through the social media fan-page, community-based tourism map, travel itinerary, community-based tourism manual, and community-based tourism network committee. This creates the model community-based tourism villages in order to establish Mae Hong Son provincial strategy.

Keywords

sustainable tourism management, community-based tourism, Shan ethnic groups

Introduction

The situation of international tourism in 2018 showed that the number of tourists around the world was more than 1,403 million people, which grew by 5.6% from the year 2017. In the Asia Pacific region, it grew by 6.5%. (UNWTO, 2019) In Thailand, has the ninth highest number of tourists and has the fourth income from tourism in the world. Tourism today focuses on the true conditions of tourist attractions within that community, society, and country, where tourists can personally search down to lifestyles, ethnic history and participate in activities as well as in various products and services. To do so is to create pride, the need to maintain various tourist attractions, and to absorb and perceive the true way of life of people in each locality. This makes tourism sustainable and naturally stable not for tourists to admire only for a short time. Sustainable tourism is to protect the resources of complex tourist attractions for sustainable use in the future and for the benefit of today's society (WTO., 1998) The tourism that tourists need to consider now is to protect and improve tourism resources in the future by managing the overall resource to cover the economy, society and maintain the natural beauty in accordance with the local culture, important ecosystem, biodiversity, and the way of life of all beings (WTTC., 1995)

At present, Thai and foreign tourists who have different tourism behaviors have turned their attention to the same point, which is the alternative tourism market, consisting of green tourism, cultural tourism and special interest tourism. (Goeldner and Ritchies, 2006) Today, the world is becoming easier, in the trend of digital technology. The convenient transportation creates faster mobility which enables business

travelers and tourists who seek new experiences and perspectives. It is easy to learn and communicate across cultures. It is a great opportunity for people all over the world to participate through various activities, especially through cultural diversity tourism activities. In 2018, Thailand has the main income from tourism. The government has encouraged many tourists to visit various tourist attractions in order to increase income for the community and the nation through tourism in various dimensions, such as ecotourism, health tourism, and cultural tourism. In 2018, more than 38 million foreign tourists visited Thailand, with over 2 trillion baht in revenue. (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, https://www.mots.go.th/old/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=11935, accessed on 30 August 2019)

At present, the government has promoted community-based tourism management by focusing on visitors to experience people's way of life within the community through history, ethnicity, perspective, and faith. It is expected to be a potential tourism because it is a community-based tourism that support the conservation of natural resources and the environment and generate revenue for the local community economy. In marketing, this type of tourism is also a niche market. The three important factors that have caused the trend to change the tourism pattern in the world tourism industry from conventional tourism to the development of alternative tourism include the demand for environmental and natural resources conservation, educational tourism, and human development. (Kamol Rattanawirakul, 2006) Tourists want to live in a new and exotic way of life or live in accordance with the atmosphere and simple local conditions in order to change the busy urban lifestyle into simplicity and peace. (Suwanee Santhanawanich, 2005)

Mae Hong Son province is a border province adjacent to Myanmar and located on a steep mountain with abundant natural conditions. There are more than 8 ethnic groups living together in peace and earn their living by farming and finding forest products. The government and provincial government agencies promote Mae Hong Son to be a province of ecotourism and cultural tourism by focusing on the community to maintain the identity forms that are ideas, beliefs, cultures, traditions, the way of life of various ethnic groups, and preserving the original environment of nature to live sustainably through the folkways of civil society. (Mae Hong Son Provincial Office, 2018) There are two tourist routes divided into Mae Hong Son Province. Northern route includes Muang, Pang Mapha, and Pai districts. Southern route includes Mae Sariang, Sob-Moei, Mae Lanoi, and Khun Yuam districts. The researchers chose to study the northern route: Muang, Pang Mapha, and Pai districts.

Researchers focus on tourism management in the community and the potential development of the people in the community to be in line with the 20-year policy and national research and innovation strategy from 2017 - 2037. (Kitiphong Phromwong, 2017) This study is in accordance with the 4-year provincial strategy of Mae Hong Son (2015 – 2018) in the first objective that to promote and develop the quality of tourism in the aspects of ecosystem, ways of life, and health. The activities of this strategy include (i) promoting the province to be “the vacation city of the middle and high income tourists”, (ii) restoring, preserving, and promoting the cultural tourism and ways of life, (iii) developing quality tourist attractions and tourism activities and encourage all-year travel activities, (iv) developing infrastructure and tourism facilities, (v) developing the potential of tourism personnel, (vi) developing and enhancing OTOP products to create value-added to tourism products, and (vii) promoting public relations and marketing both at home and abroad, strengthening the community, solving the root of the problem, adding value to local wisdom, and create income and careers within the community. (Mae Hong Son Provincial Office, 2018)

The major problem of community tourism management is tourism management, creating tourism networks between communities, community readiness, the continuous lack of participation of the government, private sectors and community organizations, and the lack of academic understanding. These issues make the travel management process driven slowly and inefficient even though the province has full of natural resources and many beautiful tourist attractions. This resulted in a loss of opportunities for tourism competition and lessens annual income to the community and provinces.

As a result, the research team is interested in exploring and finding sustainable travel management patterns to develop community-based tourism in Mae Hong Son province. This study was conducted to analyze the problems that impede community tourism management, community capacity development, and integration of community networks in tourism management to with the participation process of government agencies, private sector, and civil society. This includes the analysis of the community potential and the creation of a community-based tourism network of Pambok village, Pai district, Thamlod village, Pang Mapha district, and Naplajaad village, Muang district, Mae Hong Son

province. All of this is intended to strengthen community-based tourism and increase income for the community to be self-reliant and sustainable.

Literature review

The researchers reviewed related literatures and researches in five aspects:

1. Sustainable Tourism

In all levels of tourism, sustainability is the major concern with the preservation of authentic tourism resources and the social and cultural impacts in order to prolong the lifespan of tourism. (Rampaiphan Kaewsuriya, 2006) This includes tourism development that requires cooperation from all stakeholders based on knowledge, understanding and love of tourism resources and the environment in order to create sustainable tourism awareness. (Boonlert Chittangwattana, 2005) All of these are to ensure that tourism management does not damage natural resources, ignore local culture, look down on ethnic people, and respect tourist attractions. It is very important that the tourism communities understand the core of participation and carry on sustainable tourism.

2. Community Management

Tourism communities that want to be successful must understand the concepts of community management in all dimensions, such as governance, natural resources and the environment, welfare, safety, sanitation, and public relations in order to develop the community to achieve systematic sustainability goals. In community-based tourism management, four factors must be considered: 1) human factors 2) social factors 3) economic factors and 4) ecological factors. (Sudcheewan Nanthawan Na Ayutthaya, 2008). These four factors are interrelated, people having expertise in their assigned tasks, society joins together to share responsibilities, create income in the community, and maintaining the balance of ecological systems and natural attractions.

3. Civil Society

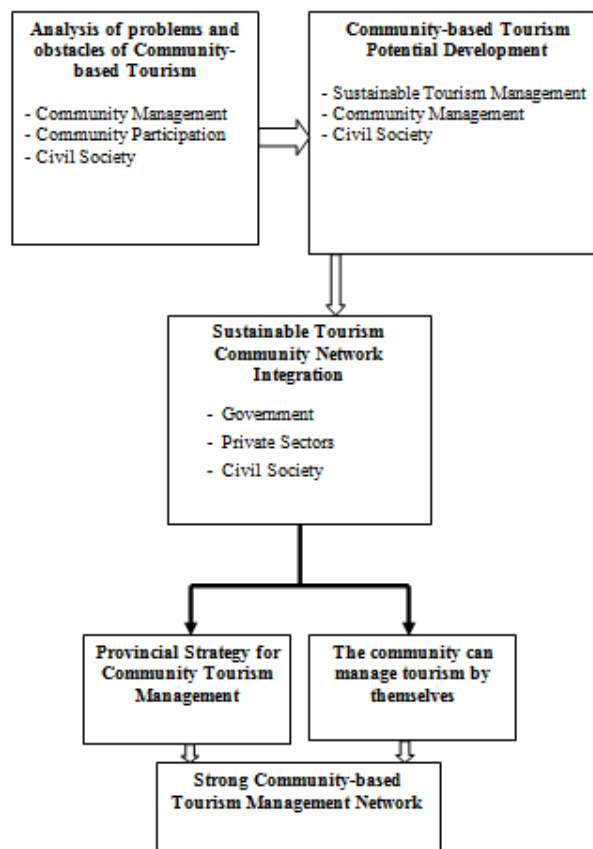
Managing the tourism community is systematically driving activities within the community. There are committees and groups such as the tourism management committee, welfare committee, homestay committee, community products or community enterprises committee, etc. Civil society concepts aim to support the social or the public sector, with a stronger and more balanced society known as a supportive society that must be developed to strengthen the community. This means that a number of people have common purpose, ideals, or beliefs. There is communication within the community, or there may be community integration, to create generosity within the community. (Prawet Wasee, 1998) Therefore, it is necessary to apply civil society process to strengthen sustainable community-based tourism.

4. Community Participation

In managing communities that lack participation, the operations or activities can be delayed, causing problems, misunderstandings, and there may be lawsuits. Therefore, the management of tourism communities is essential for all members of the community to gain knowledge, understanding, participate in planning, and receive mutual benefits. Participation means the psychological and emotional involvement of a person in a group situation. The result of such involvement is the incentive to take action to achieve the objectives of the group and to feel shared responsibility with the group. (Cohen, & Uphoff, 1981) Participation also provides an opportunity for individuals to contribute to each other with the individual's mental and emotional contributions to co-ordinate, co-operate and take responsibility for matters that have an impact on the management in order to achieve social objectives. Therefore, in community management, it is necessary to work with community members to ensure their active participation. All members are aware of the positive impact that benefits everyone.

From the synthesis of literature involved in sustainable tourism management, community management, civil society, and community engagement, this leads to the process of managing the tourism community that would require community engagement management which is related to Dejawit Nilawan's research (2010) of knowledge management to develop the community business of Ban Dok-Dang sewing group, Doi-Saket district, Chiang Mai, Thailand. The results revealed problems in four aspects: management, marketing, production, and finance and accounting. There are three aspects of group management development planning: attitude, knowledge, and skills. In this regard, the unity of the three groups and the strengthening of the development of the group management center is the pride of the community, which helps the sustainable development of community business and strengthens the network. This research is related to Phusanisa Techathakoeng's (2014) study of the development of local entrepreneurs and community-based tourism in Thepsadej district, Chiang Mai, Thailand. The study indicates that the community participates in the management of nature and environmental protection and connects to the development of community enterprises. Local entrepreneurs are able to compete. Tourists are able to experience the beauty of nature and natural resources participate in activities and purchase local souvenirs.

Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research focusing on exploratory and participatory action research.

Population and Samples

Purposive sampling was used to select the sample groups out of all stakeholders of community-based tourism from government section, private sectors, and civil society. Sixty samples are from Provincial Community Development, Provincial Tourism and Sports, representatives from tourism business, District Community Development, Sub-district Community Development, Chairman of Provincial Chamber of Commerce, community leaders, local experts, homestay entrepreneurs, local tourist guides, local representatives, and service personnel. In this regard, the researcher considered the eligibility of the criteria for the sample set in the research design. The samples have the knowledge or experience in the research focus as well as being voluntary to chat with the research team. The interviewee was chosen specifically because it allows the research team to learn and receive more accurate information than others. (Patton, 1990)

Data Collection

1. Primary Data: The researchers collect data using in-depth interview and focus group discussion that the researchers developed from relative theory. Data from exploration, interview, and group discussion were analyzed to reveal the potential of the community in managing community-based

tourism, tourism network integration, and tourism resources in the communities.

2. Secondary Data: The research team collected data from research documents, textbooks, research articles, publications, various online media, concepts and theories related to research.

Research instrument

1. The interview form is used to collect information about tourist attractions resources in the community, community potential in tourism management, and the ability to manage nature conservation using in-depth interview with the target group, group discussion, and physical survey of the target area.

The results of the analysis are divided into 3 parts. The first part is an analysis of the internal environment using 8 variables; management, marketing strategy, financial strategy, operational strategy, human resource management strategies, natural environment or integrity of the community, tourist attractions in the community, and tradition or local wisdom. The second part is the external environment. The following variables are used for external factors analysis: economy, technology, law or politics, basic social structure or cultural, and physical. The third part is the external environment operations from related stakeholders including government agencies in the area, private organizations or non-governmental organizations in the area, and competitors.

Qualitative data collection is data collection that focuses on conceptualization and interpretation to gain an understanding of human behavior and society using methods of observation, interview, conversation, and note-taking. Advanced statistics will not be used for analysis. This study is a research conducted in a natural state that does not provide or control the environment. The researcher will summarize the problem by using all-around visual logic emphasizing the dynamic process. The research method is highly flexible. (Arun Raktham and Narong Kulnithed, 2009)

2. Survey: The researchers used the concept of Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) that includes seven indicators; access, remoteness, facilities, visitor management, naturalness, social encounters, and visitor impact.

Data Analysis

The research team used the information from the literature review related to the research, information from the interview form, group conversation, and physical survey to transcribe and synthesize information according to research objectives. Reports and manuals for community action plans distributed to the general public.

Research Area

This research was conducted in the area of three villages; Pambok of Pai district, Thamlod of Pang Mapha district, and Naplajaad of Muang district, Mae Hong Son province, Thailand.

Findings

The results of the research showed that, from community analysis and stakeholder interviews, the problems that obstruct the tourism management by the community are in various aspects as follows: (i) For the internal environment, all three communities still lack of unified community management, no sharing responsibility, and systematic participation integration. (Seksit Peeratui and Theeradet Naowattana, 2019, interview) (ii) For marketing strategy, the three communities still do not understand the strategies or techniques of approach to modern marketing. They emphasize the management of traditional tourism communities, which are waiting for tourists to enter and travel by themselves. They do not use the media and methods of approaching tourists in a variety of ways. The traditional trading methods are only done in the surrounding communities. (Tharin Kungnakung, Samart Sophama, and Maneerat Mekkatan, 2019, interview) (iii) For financial strategy, all three communities have established professional groups, producers and distributors of community products, and community-based tourism services group. They lack of financial strategy training and focuses mainly on the support of government agencies. (iv) For operational strategy, all three communities still lack the community action plan, community business plan, and community tourism promotion plans that can be clearly implemented. (Yontachai Sophaworakan, Sombat Petpradub, and Ratee Kedlok, 2019, interview) (v) For human resource management strategy, all three communities have experts or wise-men that are knowledgeable in various professions and are well accepted by people in general. But they still lack the proper management of various aspects of wisdom. (Saengchan Muenboontan and Boontan Mekkatan, 2019, interview)

In the dimension of natural environment and the abundance of the community, all three communities settled next to the mountains, abundant forest conditions, rivers, and streams flowing through. They have plenty of food and ingredients. But they still a lack of joint maintenance of natural resources and the environment. (Kasem Saenritcharoen and Pee Juthasatpattarakul, 2019, interview) All three communities have significant tourist attractions such as Pambok waterfall, Miang and Thong peak, and Kho-Gu-Soh bamboo merit bridge of Pambok village, Pai district. In Tham Lod village of Pang Mapha district, there are Lod ancient cave of primitive age and San-Wua-Tor hill of the sea of fog. At Na Plajaad village, there are beautiful waterfall, natural trekking trails, and organic farm-stay activity and plantation like garlic which is the famous product of Mae Hong Son province. There are other famous attractions along the way to the three communities. However, there is no working group to maintain these attractions to be beautiful and intact. Most of the attractions are located in the national park that often creates problems between responsible government agencies and communities. (Chatree Khamjing and Minh Sukhodom, 2019, interview) For the tradition and local wisdoms, all three communities are Shan ethnic group that maintain their significant identity, ways of life, customs, and ceremonies such as worshipping village's guardian spirit, Shan ordination, wooden castle procession, etc. However, the local knowledge base has not

been gathered in the form of concrete data centers or learning centers. In the past, there was only inheritance through relatives, rather than teaching to interested youth in general. (Suwan Kaenoi, 2019, interview)

As per external environment, in economic aspect, all three communities are agriculture communities with farming, gardening, rice planting, garlic planting, and soybean planting. The main source of income comes from agricultural crops which is uncertain each year and considered a major problem for farmers throughout the country. (Phongsakon Kerdkonsab, Sukasem Khamsom, and Mon Wongsawang, 2019, interview) For technology aspect, Pambok village has access to electricity and water, but the internet and mobile signals are hard to access. (Boonanant Lerpho and Atcharee Muenboontan, 2019, interview) Thamlod and Naplajaad village have access to electricity, water, internet, and mobile signals. So, there is no problem of communication in these two communities. (Samran Wararitwuthikul and Supharat Aphinanthiphayakul, 2019, interview) All three communities still lack agricultural technology and innovation to help produce products efficiently. For law and governance, all three communities is governing in a democratic system. There is an official community leader. There is an election of the village headman and assistant village headman in accordance with the central government. There are leaders in various fields such as women leaders, youth leaders, etc. There are members of the Sub-district administrative organization in the village. All three communities also have informal leaders like elders or sages, whose members respect and obey. As for the law, there are some problems in the case that communities and tourist attractions are located in national parks causing communities and government agencies to not understand each other. (Narongdet Pothi, 2019, interview) For basic infrastructures, all three communities have good transportation systems, good electrical, water supply, and communication systems that able to welcome tourists and visitors. (Khankeaw Kanwisetsak and Nuanla-or Nithichayawong, 2019, interview) For social and cultural aspect, all three communities are ethnic groups that have simple lifestyles, friendly, peaceful, public mind, like to go to temples, make merit, and have good cultural traditions in both spiritual and Buddhist blended together. They are kind and ready to welcome visitors. (Samran Wararitwuthikul and Supharat Aphinanthiphayakul, 2019, interview)

As per external operational environment, like stakeholders, the results of the research showed that government agencies continuously support various activities of the three communities, such as agriculture, community products, women, local government. However, they still lack integration and coordination in all sectors. Private organizations or non-governmental organizations in the area participate to drive the community in many areas such as tourism, agriculture, etc. But they still lack continuity and no coordination with the government for the unity and efficiency of the community movement.

In the competition, all three communities are considered to be alliances because the production of agricultural products must rely on each other to bargain with the middleman. As for tourism, each community is finding customers by themselves. The research team will create a community-

based tourism management network that can transfer tourists among communities in Mae Hong Son province that results in mutual support and sustainability. (Pathomphong Chansawang, 2019, interview)

The research team with the participation of the communities have developed community potential in various areas and found that in the way of life is divided into 2 parts which are 1) the materials or tools that have been inherited from the past, such as the threshing machine, food preservation containers, loom, etc., and innovative tools and devices such as rice mills, water power, tractors, etc. These tools are made from the wisdom of the community. 2) The abstract that can be divided into 2 parts which are (i) the system of ideas, beliefs, attitudes, or social values, that stay behind human behavior or a moral value system that holds the minds of people in society such as the belief of village's guardian spirits, making merit, visiting temple, etc. (ii) Lifestyle Techniques whether it is a lifestyle plan, eating habits, dressing, folk play, or livelihoods. These are the specific techniques and identities of Shan ethnic groups of three communities. (Wandee Wiwitthaikul, Sukira Suwattanamathee, and Kingdao Muenkhadsee, 2019, interview)

In the aspect of beliefs, the study found that all three communities still maintain their identity in beliefs, culture, and traditions, such as paying respect to ancestors, paying respect to the guardian spirit, dress code, language, food, traditions, Shan ordination, auspicious rice offering ceremony, etc.

Local wisdom is used to transfer knowledge and activities through the system of kinship, community, and group networks that have similar cultural styles by focusing on preserving and inheriting the culture that is unique in order to make it sustainable. (Jamriang Thayanon-nanthakul, Wandee Wiwitthaikul, Somdet Nanthawiriyatanont, and Somsak Rasameephorn, 2019, interview)

Regarding tourist attractions, it was found that tourist attractions in all three communities are still beautiful and abundant, consisting of ecotourism, cultural, historical, health, recreation, such as cultural tourist sites which are Kho-Gu-Soh bamboo merit bridges of Pambok village, ecotourism like Pambok waterfalls and Lod caves, and agricultural tourism such as organic garlic farm-stay of Naplajaad village. (Phongsakhorn Kerdkonsap, Sukasem Khamsom, and Mon Wongsawang, 2019, interview)

From the analysis of the potential of the people in the area, it is found that the three communities are enthusiastic and participate in creating and promoting tourism. Government agencies and the private sector join together to develop the potential of the community to be ready to manage the tourist attractions and welcome tourists. But it is still lacking integration for efficiency in all sectors and lacking a network for tourism management between communities.



Picture 1: Group meeting to analyze the potential of the tourism community and demonstrate the community products to promote tourism in all 3 communities

The researchers convened a meeting with representatives of relevant government agencies and community representatives for integration and building a community-based tourism management network to be efficient with civil society power that relies on the participation of all parties. Facebook Fanpage, community tourism map, travel itinerary, and community-based tourism manual were created. Five community tourism committees were set up as follows: i) community tourism management committee is responsible for managing the tourism community, coordinating policy oversight, and coordinating with government and private agencies which can be divided into 2 sets; the community committee and the three community network committees. ii) The homestay management committee is responsible for accepting reservations, housekeeping, sharing the guests in order to be fair to all homestay owners. iii) Welfare committee is responsible for welfare of food and snacks, including cooking, arrange houses that tourists are having a meal, design food menus, etc. iv) The safety committee is responsible for the safety of visitors in the community. v) The local tour guide committee is responsible for organizing guides and the shuttle bus to ensure fairness to all parties. This is to ensure the management of community-based tourism to be efficient and to strengthen the community sustainably.



Picture 2: Tourism Routes Connecting 3 Communities in Mae Hong Son Province

Discussion

This research reflects the problematic conditions that impede community tourism management caused by the lack of community management in the internal environment, external environment, and external operations that do not

have an integrated network. Each sector will carry out their mission, causing the community to not be able to drive efficiently. This problem can be solved by analyzing the community potential to explain the problem in all dimensions like lifestyle, belief, and tourist attractions using three parts of the network which are government, private, and civil society working together to establish Facebook fan page, community tourism map, travel itinerary, community-based tourism manual, and community tourism committee. This has led the three communities to become a model of community-based tourism management recognized by government agencies and tourism sectors in the province. Moreover, the development of a community-based tourism management model is brought to be the strategy of the province. It related to Phusanisa Techathakerng's study (2014) which found that the community can manage the conservation of natural resources itself if they are trained, incubated and supported by the government and related sectors continuously. It is also related to the work of Dejawit Nilawan (2010) which revealed that when planning and developing the management model of the group members in three areas: attitudes, knowledge, and skills, the community is harmonious, understands the community management model, and build a strong and sustainable network.

Suggestions

- 1. Policy Suggestion:** Community-based Tourism management model should be proposed for Mae Hong Son province to be a model for other tourism communities to study in order to drive the country's tourism strategy in the same direction and to solve the problems of community-based tourism management in accordance with the same standards.
- 2. Suggestion for Further Study:** There should be research on ecotourism issues of ethnic groups in Mae Hong Son province which is in line with cultural tourism. This is to enable the management of culture and natural resources in the form of joint preservation, transmission to youth to raise awareness of preserving and appreciating natural resources, and their local ethnic culture.

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