

Local Communities' Perception on Rural Tourism

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Received: 8 December 2011 Accepted: 5 January 2012 Published: 15 January 2012

Abstract

This paper presents a review of attributes for rural tourism to be a sustainable tourism product. It also covers an overall review and conceptualization of rural tourism within the community development perspective. Rural tourism involves activities that make the rural community to directly engage in tourism either by them having full control or having their culture serves as the attraction. Evidence shows that very few studies have attempted to understand the impact of tourism from the rural peoples' point of view. Focusing on the community's participation is very important, as they are the industry's key players involved in tourism. An extensive study of the literature on the local peoples' perception and participation in tourism business is essential to draw a crystallized conceptual framework. The understanding of the rural communities' opinion on perceived impacts is important before implementing any tourism related development by the outsiders. The developed framework will be useful to understand the host tourism system and relationship that will emphasize co-management approach to promote a sustainable tourism practice.

Index terms— local community, rural tourism, perception, sustainable tourism.

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to understand the perception of tourism from rural community's point of view. Detailed review of the past studies is essential to have better understanding regarding the involvement of the local people in tourism activities. The local community often have unused land as well as underutilized premises such as unused lands and rooms. These 'dead' assets can easily be turned into a profit-making home stays. This home stay business is a flexible enterprise, unlike rigid 'hotel' structures; it can expand and contract according to the market demands (Hjalager, 1997).

Tourism draws outside capital into the host community which can lead to positive economic benefits. The benefits include a diversification of the local industry base, increased employment, higher incomes and better life style. However, the issue of sustainable tourism practice and its benefits to the community is still unclear. This concern is evident by the number of hotels, travel agencies operated by outsiders (Lepp, 2006). For instance, although the government Author : Department of Social and Development Science, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia. (Telephone : 90123307043, E-mail : puva2011@yahoo.com) (Telephone : 90389467062, E-mail : sarjit@putra.upm.edu.my) has initiated homestay programmes in Sungei Ruil, Malaysia in 2009, the direct benefits from the tourism to the indigenous community is questionable. An initial naturalistic inquiry done recently in Sungei Ruil showed that the Semai people are not enjoying any advantages from tourism;

"Although the homestay program was a good move, we do not get any money from it; in fact, the biggest homestay in our village is being operated by an outsider...how we will get any income? We may get some money only if the tourists buy our handicrafts when they are brought here by the travel agents." (Tok Batin (village headman), Sungei Ruil, Cameron Highlands, Malaysia, 2011)

Hence, important to monitor and understand the perception of the local people in the recently developed tourism programs by the government.

2 II.

3 RURAL TOURISM

In rural regions, tourism takes place as a business set up for the local community. The earliest study of rural tourism began in the 1950's, with farm tourism study by ??ger (1958), who was cited in Oppermann (1997) by emphasizing the importance of tourism in mountainous areas. Then, in the following decades, the study of rural tourism, particularly in regards to farmers, mostly focused on the economic contribution, problems faced by farmers and the social and psychological impacts of tourism to the farmers ??Oppermann, 1996). Studies in rural tourism were more concentrated in wilderness areas or National Parks, rather than in the other attractions of the rural areas, such as farm tourism and non-farm tourism (Owens 1984, as cited in Oppermann 1996). Oppermann also supported this argument by classifying different types of tourism in rural areas in terms of the level of involvement by the community. 1 shows the categorization of non-urban tourism. According to Oppermann (1996), non-urban tourism could be classified as either, wilderness tourism or rural tourism. Wilderness tourism consisted of activities with less human intervention, such as outdoor recreation in wilderness areas, national parks, national forests and uninhabited areas. Unlike wilderness tourism, rural tourism involved human involvement in the farm areas and non-farm tourism in rural areas.

Tourism activity in rural areas has increased remarkably since the 1970s in all developed countries. Perales (2002) also defined the difference between traditional versus modern rural tourism. Traditional rural tourists are tourists who migrated to cities who then come back to their own village for vacation during holidays. Whereas, modern rural tourists are those tourists who are originally from cities, that visit the rural areas during the holidays.

This situation takes place when huge migrations occur in modern and developing countries. Urbanization happens due to modernization and industrialization. Those city dwellers, originally from rural zones, usually spend their vacations in their "hometowns". However, it is considered as an agro tourism tour only if it is not for the purpose of homecoming (Abiche, 2004).

Similarly, farm tourism (a subset of rural tourism), has clear ingredients of small-scale enterprises with local roots based on local traditions ??Nilsson, 2002). Nilsson studied the driving forces of farm tourism, and distinguishing it from rural tourism, stated that farm tourism has ideological roots in the loving of nature and community tourism.

Apart from that, tourism also helps the rural community to stay together. It maintains them as a productive unit by offering work to all members and particularly to the women (Dernoi, 1983). Providing services for the tourists represents a break in the normal hunting and agriculture routine and can lead to new varied human contacts and to rise in the quality of life through the creation of new conveniences and comforts of the residential area. For instance, the indigenous community also should be introduced to new programmes aimed at their deculturalisation ?? Nicholas, 2000).

4 III.

5 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The communities can participate within three levels. Their participation can be at the decision-making level, implementation level or benefit sharing level. If the community are in the decision making level, the project can be considered as community development. If the residents are only needed during the implementation stage, then it can still be considered as a community development project. Nevertheless, the sustainability of the project in the long terms can be questionable.

Community development also helps to develop people in the rural areas of Malaysia. Research in Taman Negara, Malaysia showed that responsible tourism helps to alleviate poverty in rural areas. The indigenous people believe that tourism creates positive socio-cultural impacts, such as communications and tourism activities (Ramachandran, Shuib, Mohd Rusli, and Mat Som 2006). They are also happy accepting tourists to their area. Ancestral worshipping and animism remains core to their believe system, although some are converting to Islam, Christianity and Bahai.

Economically, this community development program creates better job opportunities, higher earnings, and a potential for small and medium enterprises. Apart from that, Foreign Direct Investment, such as international hotel chains, reduces unemployment and poverty. From an ecological aspect, researchers have found that international tourists are more sensitive towards environmental conservation. The community development process emphasizes that environmental impact is an important issue.

Political impacts show empowerment implementation. The community participation in decision-making is employed, especially on the issues related to the livelihood of the community. The governance of Taman Negara emphasized the welfare of the local community. The locals also welcome participations from Non Governmental Organizations (NGO's) to organize awareness creating programs.

Apart from these aspects, in terms of technological development, the government has set up telecommunications, such as telephone and internet facilities. This scenario allows the community to communicate with the outside world, which creates knowledge enhancement.

6 Global Journal of Human Social Science 2 36

Local Communities' Perception on Rural Tourism However, researchers also found that the community development program creates some negative impacts. Although tourism activities do not disturb traditional activities, such as hunting, farming and gathering, some locals are concerned that the younger generations have started to behave like the tourists with whom they mingled. This situation might result in the fading of indigenous cultures and values.

IV.

7 PERCEPTION

Perception is influenced by a variety of factors, including the intensity and physical dimensions of the stimulus; such activities of the sense organs, as effects of preceding stimulation; the subject's experience; attention factors, such as readiness to respond to stimuli; and motivation and the emotional state of the subject (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopaedia, 2007).

In earlier studies, the understandings of the perception of the community, towards tourism, were mainly conducted using stages or step models. The relationship between host and guest was studied using a four stages model: euphoria, apathy, irritation and antagonism, by Doxey (1975). In 1980, Butler developed a stage-related model, in the context of the host community's effort, and supports the evolution of a particular tourism area.

According to Butler, following the stages of exploration, involvement and development, the impact of tourism activities can be seen in the consolidation and stagnation levels. The process will later reach the final stages of either decline or rejuvenation. In the past decades, most studies of perception intended to understand the impacts of tourism on the community. However, some studies were also conducted before tourism activities took place in an area, to obtain the residents opinions of the possible impacts that could be brought by tourism to the community in the future.

Studies on rural residents' perceptions were done to understand the perceived impacts and attitudes of the host community, on the various types of tourism activities, (especially those related to rural settings). An earlier study by Perdue, Long and Allen (1987) examined the influence of participation, regarding outdoor recreation. Their analysis of the tourism perceptions and attitudes was done on outdoor participants and nonparticipants.

It was found from the study, that the perceptions and attitudes of participants and nonparticipants are the same. Participation of the local community in tourism development is essential. Timothy and Tosun (2003) defined participation as: "Participation, in the decision making process, means that residents have opportunities to voice their hopes, desires and fears for development and contribute to the planning process, from their own expertise and experiences."

However, it was also concluded that, intention to create more tourism development decreases significantly, and the favourability of special tourism taxes also increase when the perceived affects of tourism on outdoor recreation increases.

Similarly, Smith and Krannich (2005) conducted a tourism dependency study, to understand the attitudes of the community towards tourism. Unlike Perdue, who classified the community into participants and nonparticipants, Smith and Krannich suggested the topology of the rural community, according to their level of involvement in tourism activities. The impacts study was conducted specifically for four community types: tourism-saturated, tourism-realized, tourism-hungry and non-tourism. This classification helps to analyze and compare the perceptions and attitudes of each group, according to their own characteristics.

Longitudinal studies of residents' perception of tourism also allowed the researcher to analyze the attitudes and perceptions over a longer period. A study by Soutar and McLeod (1993) on residents' perceptions towards the impact of the Americas Cup in Fremantle, Australia, clearly shows the way that residents' expectations changed over the period of the entire event. The study covered before, during and after the event, to record the changing perceptions of the community. The result of the survey showed that the residents' quality of life improved after the event and created a platform for a long-term improvement of the city's economic development.

Similarly, another longitudinal study by Johnson, Snepenger and Akis (1994) to investigate residents' perceptions regarding the tourism facility development in the Rocky Mountains, gave the same results as Soutar and McLeod. At the beginning of the project development, the local community had high expectations and gave their full support. However, the expectations and support diminished over time gradually. In the study, which was conducted over a 6year period, they concluded that there is a significant relationship between the communities' perception of tourism with the economic and cultural history of the area.

Besides longitudinal studies, some authors have also conducted studies to develop a scale to measure residents' attitudes and perceptions towards tourism. A high reliability of the scale and a significant content and construct validity, always becomes the priority in developing the scale (Kang, Long and Perdue, 1994).

The study by Kang et al (1994) was carried out to develop a scale measurement of residents' attitude towards legal gambling. After identifying 17 items, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. Kang et al (1994) also supported confirmatory factor analysis for the study, because this technique allows alternative solutions by not only testing internal items co-Local Communities' Perception on Rural Tourism consistency, but also by testing external item consistency. Confirmatory factor analysis is the best procedure to test unidimensionality items of the scale development (Kang et al, 1994).

Cluster analysis, allows the community to be segmented into several groups before the interview is conducted. By employing cluster analysis, the researcher can obtain and analyze different opinions from each group. A study by Perez and Nadal (2005) was carried out to examine the perceptions of different opinion groups regarding the impact of tourism on the community. In the study, clusters of five groups were developers, ambivalent and cautious, protectionist and alternative developers.

Generally, respondents from all groups were aware of the development in their residential areas due to the existence of tourism activities. However, some groups had significantly different opinions to others on some factors. Development supporters did not agree with the statement that tourism development causes destruction of the environment. They believed that the introduction of tourism brings many positive impacts to the residents. In contrast with the development supporters' opinion, the prudent developers argued that tourism brings negative impacts, such as traffic congestion, inflation and environmental problems. However, both groups agreed that tourism still produces greater employment opportunities (Perez and Nadal 2005).

Dissimilarly, the perceived positive and negative impacts from tourism were analyzed from different angles using the social exchange theory. Social exchange theory proves that some residents, who perceive that the emergence of tourism in their area leads to development, will support tourism. However, if the local community feels that they do not get anything from tourism development or tourism causes negative impacts, they will not support tourism, as they believe that exchange does not happen. Thus, by employing the cost and benefit technique, the exchange that occurs between the resident and the reward or cost, can be evaluated (Andreck et al., 2005).

The study by Andreck et al, to investigate the residents' perceptions of community tourism impact, was conducted using social exchange theory. Tourism impact factors, like community environment, community problems, community life, community image, community services, and community economy, were analyzed. The result of the study does not contradict the social exchange theory. Those who are actively involved in tourism business activities have a greater perception of the positive impacts, but still agree with others about the negative impacts occurring.

Studies to improve current models from literature have also been conducted. A study by Gursoy and Rutherford (2003) aimed to collect and repackage the determinants of residents support towards tourism. Findings show that the host support and contributions towards tourism development in the rural areas were affected directly and indirectly by nine factors: the level of community concern, eco-centric values, and utilization of a tourism resource base, community attachment, the condition of the local economy, economic benefits, social benefits, social costs and cultural benefits. This study is also an extension of the study by Gursoy, Jurowski and Uysal (2002), which suggested that cost and benefit factors of tourism impacts, must be segregated to improve the understanding of the communities' attitude towards tourism. Mazilu and Iancu (2006) who conducted a series of studies in Austria, Sweden, Ireland and Romania, also agree that the implications of agro tourism can be both positive and negative. According to the authors, agro tourism can prevent depopulation, by preserving employment for the local residents, by involving them in tourism activities like providing accommodation and transport. This finding is similar, to an earlier study by Derno, explaining that rural tourism is able to dissuade residents in the rural areas from migrating. Apart from that, a few other advantages found were:

- Agro tourism diversifies work force usage in the particular areas, rather than concentrating only on agriculture.
- Involvement into rural activities by allowing farmers to offer services or rental accommodation to tourists, whilst taking care of agriculture, at a same time.
- Extra profit gained through tourism activities can be used to improve electricity supply, communication facilities, and upgrading the condition of the roads.
- The production of local food and handicrafts also helps to capitalize the cultural heritage of the community

Despite the number of positive impacts of tourism, researchers also found some negative impacts caused by tourism: The negative implications include:

- An increasing pressure on the environment
- A dramatic change in the socio culture of the community
- The increasing number of tourists causes a lack of accommodation
- Problems of planning, public participation in tourism activities and partnership with other stakeholders emerge
- Farmers' lack of competencies and awareness

Global Journal of Human Social Science

8 CONCLUSION

Overall, five attributes were found to be common discussion by many past researchers. Figure 2.2 shows that the economical, social and developmental attributes are been studied by most of the researchers. ^{1 2 3 4}

¹Volume XII Issue I Version I January

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⁴January



2

Figure 1: Figure 2 :

1

Wilderness	Rural Tourism
Tourism	
Outdoor	Farm Tourism
Recreation	
In Wilderness	
Areas	
National Parks	Non-Farm
	Tourism in Rural
	Areas
National Forests	
Generally	
Uninhabited Areas	
Source : Oppermann (1996)	
Table	

Figure 2: Table 1 :

.1 Acknowledgement

Fundamental Research Grant Scheme, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia.

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