

Abstract

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries with a still greater potential for, growth. Nevertheless, it can create many problems in regions that lack a clear strategy of tourism development. In Thailand, tourism is an economic activity that plays a vital role in socio-economic development. Tourism on the island of Koh Samui, the study area, has significant effects on the local community. The island has faced a multitude of problems caused by an increase in tourism coupled with a lack of appropriate plans and strategies. To ameliorate the negative impacts of increasing visitors, a community participation approach has been applied in response to local problems and needs in tourism development with the aim of creating long term sustainability.

In general, this research aims to develop a community participatory planning framework for local tourism development in the South of Thailand. The specific objectives of the research were to study the community participation approach and its techniques in local tourism planning; to examine the magnitude and intensity of people's participation in local tourism planning; to assess the benefits gained by local people from their participation in local tourism planning; to obtain people's feedback and satisfaction level on community participation in the local tourism planning process; to identify factors affecting community participation in local tourism planning and identify problems and potentials; and to formulate an appropriate strategy to strengthen community participation in local tourism planning.

The research selected three different initiated groups of community participation in local tourism development in Koh Samui including Tambon Municipality initiated group (TMIG) which launched by local government, community-based group (CBG) executed by native-Samui people, and private sector initiated group (PSIG) which organized by a combination of both native-Samui people and foreigners who ran their business in the community. These three mentioned initiated groups were explored in this research in various prospects of participation applied in their local tourism planning.

The research was conducted in three villages of two sub-districts including Ban Chaweng Yai and Ban Bo Phut in Bo Phut sub-district, and Ban Na Thon in Ang Thong sub-district in Koh Samui. A standardized questionnaire was employed to collect data from participants in local tourism development. Other primary data collection methods included key informants interviews and focus group discussions using a case-study approach. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were applied in this research. The qualitative analysis was applied in a case-study approach of the three different models mentioned above. Qualitative analysis was employed to analyze the institutional framework, roles and responsibilities, forms and patterns of local people in their participatory planning process and interactions of stakeholders involved. The strengths and limitations of the three case studies were also synthesized.

The quantitative analysis was used to describe socio-economic characteristics of participants in the three different models of participation. A "likert" scale was used to measure the intensity of participation, degree of benefit gained and satisfaction level of participants' activity.

The main findings of the research showed that participants had different social and economic characteristics. Women were involved more in the CBG than in the other two

groups and the participants of the CBG had relatively higher education level than the other two cases. There were certain differences in the institutional framework and participatory approach in the three cases involved in the research. The TMIG was characterized with a formal and systematic planning process applying a participatory approach. All participants in the TMIG were forced to participate in the implementation phase. They were always involved in the implementation stage but not in the M&E phase. The participation of people in CBG and PSIG was active in all development phases by having a local committee of both groups to organize and coordinate their tourism activities. The intensity of participation was high and direct in the decision-making and implementation stage, but relatively less so in the M&E stage.

The participants in all three tourism planning models received a high degree of benefits in social, economic, institutional and environmental aspects. Although the degree of benefits varied, participants reported that they were very satisfied with the types of benefits they had received.

The key common factors affecting the intensity of participatory activity in local tourism planning in all three key phases comprised of both social and economic aspects. In particular, these were the degree of benefit gained and the level of satisfaction with respect to environmental conservation; the increase in the resource utilized management, education level, occupation, degree of benefit gained and the level of satisfaction with the increase in productivity; the degree of benefit gained in capacity building; the degree of satisfaction regarding the enhancement of group ties, and the degree of satisfaction relating to the preservation and promotion of local tradition and culture.

Major problems found in local tourism planning related to low levels of education, lack of knowledge and skills, little awareness of local tourism development, low perception of people's participation, lack of time, lack of interest in participation, unclear plans and responsibilities in organizing community participation. In addition, a lack of law enforcement, inadequate budget, insufficient personnel to promote participatory activities, influence exerted from big investors from business groups, poor coordination among development, local agencies and municipality and lack of support from government agencies from both central and local levels, all contributed to the problems.

However, positive factors found in the three groups included the existence of people, and their local resources, strong leaders, the natural beauty of Koh Samui, a willingness to join the people and extensive social networking for resource mobilization as well as the decentralization policy and participatory planning supported by central and local government of Thailand.

Three sets of recommendations are suggested in this research. One is on the specific improvements for local tourism participatory planning process of the TMIG, CBG and PSIG. Another is the formulation of relevant strategies to strengthen the local tourism participatory planning process. The third is the proposed model for effective participatory local planning process applying co-management approach for Koh Samui which can be replicated to other areas of the country.

As community participation is one of the mechanisms that has been applied in various development stages of local tourism planning. It could respond to people's problems and needs and thus improve their quality of life and their community as a whole. This research

has successfully described the process of socio-ecological interaction on local tourism development. But, the sustainability of the local tourism development depends on how these kinds of participatory process are formulated and implemented in the future to meet with local needs.