

ABSTRACT

There are several researches in the field of tourism which exist and had shown a clearer understanding on how the local community or residents perceive the dynamic and complex phenomena behind tourism. It is apparent that the evaluation of community-level resource utilization and perception of tourism impacts will be valuable information in identifying successful strategies for tourism development.

The goals of tourism development are to find ways on how to boost the benefits at the same time minimize the costs of tourism. This study attempts to investigate the underlying dimensions which explain the resident's behavior of the resource use and perception on the impact of tourism development in Koh Yao Island. In addition, it would identify the potentials and provides a conceptual framework which would focus on the active participation of the local community in the area under study. The social exchange theory provided a fundamental framework for this study. The dimensions of the tourism impacts were addressed by explicating economic, social/cultural, environmental/physical impacts of tourism development from literature review.

Koh Yao Island was selected as the study area because this area provides fine multifaceted tourism attractions, generates many tourists and influences the host community's life. Seven villages were selected from three different sub-districts to represent the whole island. A combination of questionnaire and interview surveys was conducted to measure the perceptions of the local community concerning the utilization of the natural resources, sustainability indicators and carrying capacities. A total of 100 responses were obtained for supporting the data and SWOT analysis.

From the findings of this study, residents perceived the impacts of tourism as five different dimensions embodying economic benefits, social costs, cultural enrichment, environmental deterioration, and physical enhancement. Generally, a higher level of tourism development and growth of community affects residents' perceptions of tourism development impacts. Residents who have higher community attachment and who had been living in the research area for a longer time period had more concerns about the perceived impacts of tourism. In addition, perceived tourism impacts were significantly differed across household incomes, age and education groups. Through the analysis of the gathered information, a proposed tourism development strategy has been created in order to facilitate the need of an effective tourism development planning in Koh Yao Island. For future study, it is suggested that a further investigation of determinants affecting residents' perceptions is needed for better understanding and explanation of the impacts of tourism development. It is believed that this study would help tourism planners and developers formulate and implement better strategies.