

## ***ABSTRACT***

Tourism communities are collections of stakeholders that include government agencies, business owners, residents and tourists. While not all stakeholders agree on how tourism destinations should be developed, most stakeholders agree that more can be achieved through collaborative efforts. What is less clear is how effective collaboration can be achieved. This thesis aims to investigate: how tourism stakeholders effectively collaborate in a regional setting in Thailand.

Specific research questions to guide the resolution of this research problem are:

- How do stakeholders perceive their roles?
- What is the nature of stakeholder collaboration?
- What factors foster and/or hinder effective tourism stakeholder collaboration?

Stakeholder collaboration has been widely researched in general management and more recently in tourism management. A number of studies in tourism suggest adopting partnership and/or collaborative approaches to destination management on the basis that an enhanced understanding and mutual benefits generated among stakeholders will lead to better outcomes for the host community generally. Moreover, Swarbrooke (1999) puts forward the idea that stakeholders in tourism should work together if they wish to develop a more sustainable form of tourism for the destination. In support, Bramwell and Lane (2000) indicate that stakeholder collaboration can contribute to principles of sustainable development by having several stakeholders involved in tourism policy planning. Furthermore, Buhalis (2000) argues that stakeholders should pool resources to develop and implement comprehensive strategies in order to compete successfully with other destinations. Thus there is an emerging consensus that tourism destinations can be better managed through stakeholder collaboration. While there has been substantial interest in understanding the benefits relating to stakeholder collaboration there is a need for academic research to explore specific issues of collaboration, especially those relating to practical

considerations (Bramwell & Lane, 2000). Moreover, there is a need for empirical research to examine the fundamental factors critical to effective tourism collaboration.

This thesis seeks to further understanding of stakeholder collaboration in the tourism destination context. The research problem of how do tourism stakeholders effectively collaborate was broken down to gaining insights into the perceived roles of tourism stakeholders from the public, private and local community sectors; the nature of tourism stakeholder collaboration, including motives for joining a collaboration and insights into how collaborations work in practice; and which factors foster and/or hinder effective tourism stakeholder collaboration, especially member satisfaction. A review of the literature particularly identified a lack of studies that focused on robust measures to measure member satisfaction and potential predictors. Most of the studies of stakeholder collaboration and/or partnership are drawn from outside the tourism literature. In addition, studies are conceptual or qualitative in nature. The few studies in related areas use small samples and single item measures. Only a few studies used specific outcomes measures such as member satisfaction. Accordingly, a conceptual model of five independent factors and their effect on Collaboration Member Satisfaction (CMS) was developed and tested. The CMS construct and measure was developed as a suitable indicator of effective tourism stakeholder collaboration.

To address these issues, this study employed a sequential mixed method to investigate tourism stakeholder collaboration. The empirical data was collected from tourism collaboration members and individuals/organisations involved in tourism in the Chiang Rai region of Thailand. The data collection for this research was divided into two stages. Study 1 was mainly involved with qualitative interviews. In Study 2, a questionnaire survey was developed, tested and administered. Purposive sampling and the snowball technique were used to collect interview data from twenty respondents. While, a self administered questionnaire was used for the survey of members of four tourism collaborations. Consequently, 161 questionnaires were collected for the quantitative study. In the

questionnaire survey in Study 2, two open ended questions provided the opportunity to triangulate findings from the data sets.

Accordingly, this thesis provided three empirical data sets: qualitative interviews, quantitative survey data, and qualitative survey findings. Overwhelmingly, respondents agreed that the government plays and should play the dominant lead role in tourism destination planning and development. Accompanying this agreed allocation of responsibility was an acknowledgement that the private and local community sectors played a passive follower role. Compliance and conformity to government policy and funding arrangements was accepted. However, associated with the public sector's lead role was a degree of confusion, complexity and lack of continuity of activities. For the private sector there was an acceptance that they could do more for themselves through networking opportunities within industry groupings. Both the private and local community sectors felt that they had a lack of voice on tourism development issues. In addition, three major issues were discussed in relation to the nature of tourism stakeholder collaboration. Most respondents recognised the potential for tourism within the Chiang Rai region together with a positive impact from participating in a tourism collaboration. Motives for joining a collaboration included perceived individual and community benefits, together with a need to meet colleagues and friends. In practice, the issue of genuine participation was raised as not all stakeholders fully participated in a tourism collaboration even though the range of stakeholders' participation in the local tourism collaboration was representative. In particular, the results from the interviews highlighted issues in relation to the project based nature of collaboration together with the need for harmony and matching achievements to goals.

For the quantitative study, a conceptual model was developed and tested that included five proposed drivers of effective collaboration against a dependent variable of Collaboration Member Satisfaction (CMS). Multiple item scale measures were used that differentiated this empirical study from previous studies. Multiple regression analysis indicated that perceived individual benefits, trust, and communication significantly contribute to CMS overall and thus, lead to effective tourism collaboration. In the overall equation, trust was

the strongest predictor of CMS. Further group analysis highlighted how the predictors of CMS varied between private/public and male/female stakeholder groups. That is, interdependency contributed significantly to CMS for public sector members while representation quality and equal participation contributed significantly to CMS for private members. Accordingly, three hypotheses were fully supported while two hypotheses had contingent support. For the qualitative findings from the survey questionnaire eighty-five respondents answered questions about a time in the collaboration when they were happy or unhappy. Most responses related to representation, communication and resourcing issues. Those who have had positive experiences in their group appreciate the perceived benefits from the tourism stakeholder collaboration. Compared to those who have had positive experience, the number of members who have had negative experiences is relatively small. In addition, respondents commented on participation, goal setting and benefits. In general terms the findings from the three sets of data tended to be consistent. The one exception was the notion of equal participation. The qualitative data tended to indicate the importance of this issue however, the quantitative study found that equal participation influenced private members and no other groups. This bias toward private members was not evident from the qualitative data.

In summary, this thesis has answered the research problem through an understanding of broader contextual issues and the development of a conceptual framework for effective tourism collaboration. Key predictors of Collaboration Member Satisfaction have been identified and corroborated. Implications for tourism sectors include practical considerations to provide more opportunity for private and local community voice, together with an emphasis on communication issues. The thesis extends previous knowledge in particular by developing and testing a conceptual framework using robust measures. However, limitations to the thesis include sample size issues and a sampling frame from a regional area in Thailand. Future research could attempt to attract larger samples and test the model in different geographic and cultural settings, together with model modifications.