

Creation and Development of Local Tourism Using Tree Bank Model

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Abstract

The 20-Year National Strategy determined tourism as an essential element of economic development of Thailand, focusing on diversity tourism to generate income for local communities, such as Ban Tham Sue Community in Kaeng Krachan District of Phetchaburi Province. The community is rich in natural resources and has used the tree bank model to attract tourists to do creative activities initiated by community leaders and villagers. As a result, the tree bank is becoming a learning center that gives extraordinary and impressive experiences to tourists who are interested in various species of plants. The tree bank becomes a unique selling point of Ban Tham Sue Community and motivates the community and community leaders to figure out how to earn more income for households, such as by offering homestay and local products to preserve an original way of life of the people and resources of the community. An important finding obtained from this study is that in developing a local tourism area, it is essential to make local tourism become community-based tourism where members of the community take part in determining the tourism model and agreeing on tourism management to lead the community to sustainable development and improve the grassroots economy following the government's policy aimed to distribute income to local households.

Keywords: Tree Bank, Development, Community-Based Development, Local Tourism, Creation

Introduction

From the past to the present, "tourism" has been an industry essential to Thailand's economic system. That is because tourism can generate income for households and local communities and is considered a crucial driver of the country's economic system. In 2019 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand took in around 3 trillion baht in tourism revenue (Isaranews Agency, 2020). That means tourist expenditures play an important role in distributing funds to Thailand's economic system. Meanwhile, on the topic of competitiveness building of the 20-Year National Strategy (2018-2037), it is mentioned that in terms of tourism promotion, the focus is on the creation of diversity tourism to attract various groups of tourists, especially through creative and cultural tourism that combines ecotourism and community-based tourism to distribute income to local communities. Thus, it can be said that an essential result of tourism is to enable communities to earn income from tourists through a new tourism model that creates an outstanding and unique characteristic of an area to attract tourists. This

is in line with a research study conducted by Twichasri (2017), which notices that the identity of a community is a part of making the community a tourist attraction. Local cultures and unique ways of life make the community interesting, lead to the sustainable development of local tourism, and generate income to the community. At the same time, technology influences the occurrence of SoLoMo tourism, which relies on social networks to search for tourist attraction information (Piboonrungraj, 2013). This can be seen from the fact that there are now many travel pages on Facebook to take people to visit many places and the followers of such pages can obtain and use information on tourist attractions to travel independently. Another component of SoLoMo tourism is a local area. In other word, there is a trend for tourists to travel in order to absorb the culture of the local area to appreciate its historical values, such as the original way of life. Many tourists tend to blend themselves with the nature of the local area instead of prioritizing convenience from their travel. These tourists spread their travel information via mobile devices to interest their followers. Thus, SoLoMo tourism creates a trend for tourists to visit local areas of Thailand from new perspectives (Somnuxpong, 2017).

One of the provinces with interesting local tourist attractions is Phetchaburi, which is not only rich in natural resources, but also a charming province with a diversity of tourist attractions, including cultural and local wisdom tourist attractions, such as Thai Song Dam Cultural Center in Khao Yoi District, and “Uncle Thanom’s Sugar Palm Farm”, a local wisdom learning center of Phetchaburi Province. This is consistent with community-based tourism (Phueakbuakhao & Phueakbuakhao, 2018). Another outstanding point of Phetchaburi Province is tourism integration based on a sufficiency economy with the cooperation of the community. The essential principle on which it focuses is the relationship between available resources and potentials of the community to make the best use of such resources through the existing body of knowledge and local wisdom to combine with various activities under the principle of three components and two conditions, which are fundamental to development and sustainability of local tourism management as seen in the operation of the Community Enterprise of Kwangchow Waterfall Floating Market in Yang Nam Klad Neua Sub-district, Nong Ya Plong District, Phetchaburi Province. The enterprise shows that group gathering of people in the community and dedication of the community leaders can develop a very dry area into a local tourist attraction under the short name entitled “Kwangchow Floating Market” as shown in the interview of Suthep Trairat in MGR Online (2017)’s “Kwangchow Waterfall Floating Market, Thailand’s First Floating Market on a Waterfall based on the King’s Philosophy.” This project involves outstanding components of the King’s Philosophy from the use of Vetiver grass to keep water in the soil to forest plantation in different levels and building of Kaem Ling (monkey cheeks) to store water in the area. An essential mechanism is a cooperation of people in the community in planting and restoring the forest. As a result, natural resources are abundant again and can be used for economic benefits under the name of Kwangchow Floating Market. This floating market was once a dry pineapple farm and now it becomes the community’s economic area and has been registered as the Community Enterprise of Kwangchow Waterfall Floating Market with the main objective to improve and sell local products and food to tourists, such as Karen fried banana, which is made from cultivated banana grown by people in the community, fried with Karen flour recipe, and packed in a natural bamboo container used to attract consumers. It can be seen that if all components of the community, including leaders, villagers, and local government organizations, work together to find the community’s strengths to contribute to local tourism, households will be able to generate income from tourism, conformed to the Second National Tourism Development Plan (2017-2021), which requires the community to take part in the development and management of tourism activities, increase its competitiveness, and benefit from the arrival of tourists (Mulmit, 2021).

Kwangchow Waterfall Floating Market is an important case study that shows the creation and development of local tourism. Moreover, there is another community named Ban Tham Suea in Kaeng Krachan District of Phetchaburi Province, which is found to have certain strengths to develop local tourism that involves “the use of community forest and tree bank to promote tourism.” Its unique characteristic, which makes it possible to integrate the tree bank with tourism, is different from many communities that try to use products and services as their strengths to attract tourists. The researchers realize the advantage of the community becoming a prototype in terms of creative use of the community’s capacity to attract tourists and increase the forest area of the country as a whole.

Tree Bank, Community Forest and Creation of Tourism Context

Another area obviously having the potential for development of community-based tourism may be reflected from the idea of a community leader (Suthep Pimsiri) who wants to return the forest to the area and views that forest will be a source of income for people in the community and their children in the future. Investing in forest creation in the form of tree bank will, thus, benefit the community in many different ways. Many people have a question of what the tree bank is. The answer to this question is that tree bank is a form of savings, not an investment. Under this program, trees are used as an investment asset. The growth of trees will contribute to financial value in the future. An important mechanism of this program is that people in the community grow and look after the trees in their areas as well as those of the village. Then, a register is made following the types and value of each species of trees determined by concerned requirements or criteria until they are cut down (Liangrattanachaiyakun, 2017). Implementation of the tree bank program is supported by the state-owned Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC). The growing trees can be compared to a future pension of those who participate in the community’s tree bank program. The tree bank can also become an agricultural learning center.

Abundant natural resources and assets from the trees become natural capital that people who want to breathe fresh air and enjoy local tourism come to visit for a rest and feel that they are close to nature. The tree bank turns into a learning center where tourists can learn about different species of plants and is able to attract tourists to visit and study at the same time. This encourages the community leaders and villagers to figure out how to earn more income from tourists for households in the community. It is found that the naturalness of the community, which makes it an ideal place for visitors to take a rest in a simple style and blend with a simple way of life, leads to the opening of homestay for tourists and groups of people who wish to learn about the tree bank. Moreover, Ban Tham Suea Community offers creative activities for tourists to participate during the day, such as making coconut roll and salted egg infused with pandan leaves, leading to the community’s products sold to tourists. As a result of these creative processes by the community, people are able to distribute more income and work in the local area in accordance with the government’s policy that intends to drive sustainable and creative development of community-based tourism in order to distribute income and reduce inequality through local tourism. Therefore, the researchers believe that a combination of tree bank and tourism would be a form of creative local tourism that can increase income for villagers. If multiple communities in Thailand promote the tree bank system in their local areas via cooperation between the community leaders and members, encourage the villagers to believe that growing trees under the tree bank scheme is an investment for long-term benefits. The first benefit of the tree bank is an increase in forest areas. Then, certain resources and characteristics of the community, such as the identity of the local area, natural richness, and different species of plants grown by the villagers to create a natural learning center, are used to attract tourists who appreciate the local and natural ways of life. Additionally, houses are modified to offer a homestay experience to tourists who wish

to stay overnight. This will create another tourism trend to generate income for the local community. However, the researchers view that people in the community are the most important factor to determine the start of successful operations. This is in line with Rojrungsat (2013) who indicates that the participation of people in the community is the first and most important factor for local tourism management since the people are the main driving force to distribute income to the community. Based on all of the abovementioned data, the researchers have developed a chart showing the development of local tourism integrating the tree bank model, which can be adopted by the local community as follows:

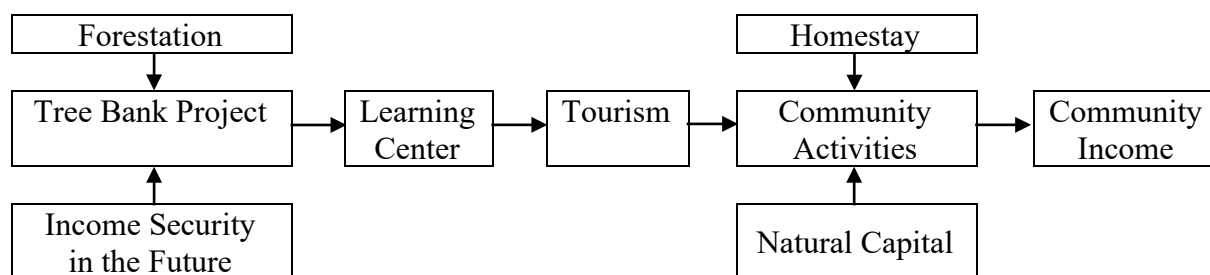


Figure 1 The connection of tree bank, tourism development and community income distribution

Community-Based Tourism to Promote Community Economy

Results of local tourism development include creative power and further development to circulate or distribute income to people in the community. On the contrary, it is essential for the community to be aware that tourists may also change its identity or natural charm. That is to say that if tourism is determined by the tourists themselves, damages or negative impacts may occur in the community. One of the problems comes from the tourists who are not truly aware of the culture and traditions of the community or environmental impacts that are caused to the community. This finding is in line with Nonthachot (2014)'s study who indicates that tourists often bring to local community problems involving solid waste and filth, air pollution, and noise pollution disturbing the way of life of people in the community. Another problem that the community has to be careful with is unfair income distribution and benefit sharing, which may further lead to conflict among people in the community. Meak-on & Bejarananda (2013)'s study notes that local tourism development usually comes with a risk of community's identity loss, such as removal of a local wooden house to construct a building to accommodate tourists. Moreover, some activities of the tourists may result in the fading of the local way of life. The researchers believe that without proper management, the community may experience unexpected changes. Thus, the community should develop mutual understanding and rules, and ask for cooperation from the tourists to not disturb the way of life of people in the community. An important thing that needs to be done is "to make local tourism become community-based tourism" (Mothonthil, 2019). In other words, members of the community have to take part in determining the tourism model or local tourism management, such as a selection of outstanding points of the community to offer to tourists, assigning households to receive and serve the tourists, initiating activities in the local areas based on the expertise of each household, and encouraging the tourists to participate in different processes of the activities to enable them to truly appreciate the community identity, such as an activity to help the tourists learn about the background of the community's tree bank from the households that are members of the tree bank program, an activity that enables the tourists to grow trees in the area, or an activity for the tourists to learn how to make coconut roll from the villagers. As a result, the tourists will also buy local products from the community. This is a chance for households to produce and sell products to tourists. An important aspect of community-based tourism is that people in the community need to reach

agreements among themselves to avoid internal conflicts, prevent any damages to the community identity, and preserve resources of the community to ensure that they will be sustainable and benefit the new generations. This is in line with a research study entitled “Management of Sustainable Local Tourism: A Case Study of Ban Khok Krai of Phang Nga Province” by Pongsakornrangsin in 2014, which points out that for local tourism management, sustainable income generation and benefit distribution to the local community are the matters that should be used to motivate people in the community to participate in related activities. At the same time, the tourists have to receive new and impressive experiences while the richness of natural resources and environment should not be affected.



Figure 2 Study of the community’s tree bank and activities offered to the tourists

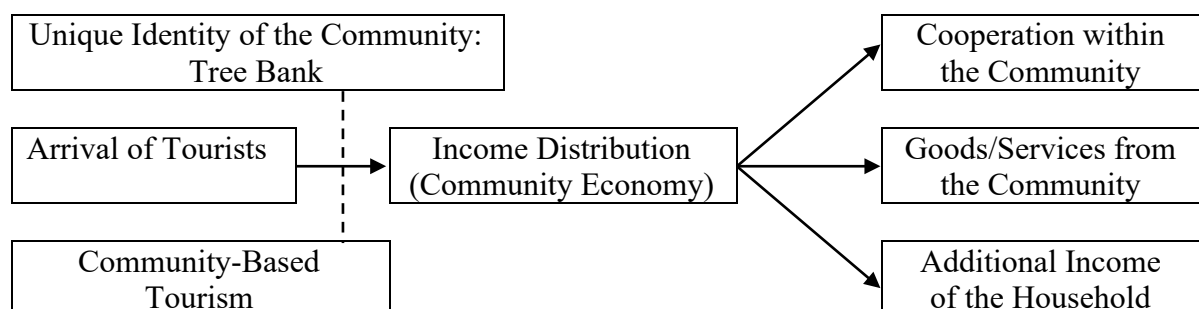


Figure 3 The connection of community-based tourism and promotion of community economy

Conclusion

Based on the data mentioned above, it can be seen that the community’s creative processes have used the local context, local way of life, and activities as the strengths to create the community identity that is an essential component of local tourism in order to generate income for people in the area. Ban Tham Suea Community in Kaeng Krachan District, Phetchaburi Province, has integrated tree bank model with tourism to make the tree bank a natural tourist attraction that allows tourists to be close to nature, which responds to the current tourism trend where people focus more on simple tourism and local way of life experience. According to Thailand Tourism Intelligence Center, it is found that local tourism is a tool that can truly drive a grassroots economy since it enables income distribution to the community (Government Savings Bank’s Research Center (2019). Moreover, if any community wishes to adopt a creative tourism model involving the tree bank to its local area, the five development principles, including management by the community, product promotion, cultural conservation and dissemination, maintenance of the community’s nature, and service quality, developed by the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (Public Organization) should be used as a framework for enhancing the local community’s capabilities to gradually develop its tourism. Such community must be able to deal with the following three issues to become a strong foundation: (1) economy: creation

and development of local tourism using the tree bank model can generate additional income and create works for people in the community; (2) society: creation and development of local tourism using the tree bank model encourage participatory process; and (3) environment and culture: creation and development of local tourism using the tree bank model benefits the community and truly considers the impacts on natural resources.

Finally, the essential mechanism, which is the process to drive local tourism, must be carried out by the community that is the real owner of the area since people in the community understand the context and limitations of the area and are able to present the area's outstanding elements in the form of creative tourism model. Strengths and cooperation as well as opinions of people in the community are important factors that will lead the community to creative development. Therefore, local tourism should be in the form of community-based tourism, not just travel in the community, to ensure that benefits will truly be distributed to the local households. All of the information stated above is a part of the extraction of knowledge from the review of academic documents and a field trip to collect primary data from the community, which will be useful for conducting an in-depth research study on the topic that can be developed to a long-term community development policy for the sustainability of local tourist attractions in the future.

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