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INNOVATION IN CONSERVATION TOURISM MANAGEMENT, COMMUNITY GROUPS TALO MAKON DAM AT BAN BIKE, YALA, THAILAND

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Abstract

The research aims to 1) study the ecotourism of Community Groups Talo Makon Dam, 2) analyzes the cost of managing ecotourism of Community Groups Talo Makon Dam, and (3) develop and manage conservation-oriented strategies that align with the Community Groups Talo Makon Dam. The findings revealed that the costs and revenue distribution from tourism to the community, the most significant aspect was the confidence and security ensured by those responsible for tourist safety, the next crucial factors included tourism activities contributing to supplementary income for the community, and the establishment of medium or small-sized tourism enterprises, respectively. In terms of developing conservation-oriented management by the community, it was found that challenging. Clear development directions are essential, with a focus on prioritizing the local community's involvement in managing and overseeing tourist destinations. A tourism management committee is pivotal in coordinating collaboration between local leaders and relevant stakeholders.

Keywords: Innovation, Sustainable Tourism, Conservation Tourism Management

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Introduction

Tourism is one of the significant avenues that generates income and facilitates monetary circulation between countries, contributing to the economic expansion of developing nations (Rattanasirivilai, 2023). Thailand, endowed with diverse tourism resources encompassing natural beauty, arts, and traditions, primarily emphasizes two key resources: natural attractions and cultural elements. As tourism ventures into new dimensions, it should focus on activities that foster deeper learning experiences and engage local communities directly in reaping benefits. This is crucial because when local communities comprehend the benefits of their existing culture, they cultivate a sense of value and pride, fostering efforts towards genuine preservation. Tourism plays a vital role in shaping societal, cultural, and environmental impacts on numerous destinations. Policies and tourism plans are often devised by governmental bodies and benefit-oriented groups, often reflecting the satisfaction of only one side of the tourists. Presently, the direction of sustainable tourism emphasizes development in environmental, cultural, and community aspects. The 9th national economic and social development plan emphasizes community-driven development and tourism, supporting communities to manage their resources to create jobs and enhance community resilience. Public participation is pivotal. Consequently, conservation-based tourism has gained significant popularity among travelers. Therefore, if communities can elevate and leverage various tourism aspects within their communities to develop livelihoods alongside conserving natural resources and the environment, national-level development goals can be achieved in alignment with the 9th National Economic and Social Development Plan. This strategy aims to ensure the stability of natural resources and the environment, support community participation, and create resilience to withstand the impacts of climate change and natural disasters (Chinsomboon, 2019; Srithong, Suthitakon & Karnjanakit, 2019). The Department of Tourism undertakes tasks related to tourism service development, tourist attractions, tourism personnel, MICE business, and tourist leadership. It also promotes and facilitates international film productions in Thailand to foster economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits.

Talo Makon Dam, initiated due to royal initiatives is in Ban Bike, Moo 5, Budi Subdistrict, Mueang District, Yala Province, Thailand. Construction commenced in 2012 and was completed in 2016, totaling a five-year construction period. Overseen by the Medium-Sized Irrigation Construction Office No.16, Royal Irrigation Department, this project is categorized as a medium-sized irrigation project. The main structure dam is standing at 23 meters high, with an 8-meter width at the crest and spanning 310 meters in length. Its water retention capacity is 1.14 million cubic meters. It was handed over to the Yala Irrigation Project on September 25, 2017. Currently, its water retention capacity is approximately 0.80 million cubic meters, about 70% of the reservoir's capacity. It can supply water to various water distribution points but may not cover the entire project due to ongoing water management processes. Then the local community has transformed it into a conservation-based tourist attraction to ensure sustainability. The objective is to generate income and attract tourists to visit the conservation-based tourism area. This rapid expansion has led to environmental and cultural repercussions. As a result, a new concept of low-impact tourism has emerged, focusing on minimizing negative impacts on both the tourist destination and the local community. One popular approach is conservation-based tourism, which the Talo Makon Dam exemplifies. This form of tourism is increasingly popular today as it reflects the lifestyle of the community surrounding the dam effectively. It aligns with the research by Nokkaew (2012), addressing community-based environmental tourism management. It focuses on the lives of the local people and related communities, intertwining with the natural resources and environment, along with their continuity and sustainability. It highlights the community's ability to accommodate inclusive, reasonable, and culturally aligned tourism that integrates the local community-based tourism resources in Thailand. These resources encompass a diverse range,

including forest ecosystems, cultural heritage, and local lifestyles deeply interconnected with natural environments. These elements contribute to distinct and prominent tourism identities. This type of tourism integrates cultural and lifestyle aspects into natural tourism systems. It's characterized by community-based environmental tourism resources serving as the foundation for sustainable tourism resources.

Therefore, to increase tourism revenue for the community around the Talo Makon Dam, researchers recognized the importance of studying innovative conservation-based tourism management by the community at Ban Bai. This initiative aims to develop tourism businesses within the area through innovative tourism practices within a networked area. This approach serves as a new avenue for blended tourism management under systematic concepts, leveraging community participation and local governance. This strategy seeks to elevate the quality of tourism destinations, thereby enhancing competitiveness within the tourism industry. Moreover, it stimulates entrepreneurial initiatives that contribute to the distribution of tourism-generated income within the region, fostering increased competitiveness.

Literature Review

The Concept of Innovation in Sustainable Tourism

Eco-tourism refers to the development of tourism that conscientiously sustainably utilizes natural resources, aiming for stability and ultimately returning benefits to local communities. This involves a comprehensive assessment of both natural and social resources, which consequently affects the economic sustainability of the residing community (Arugsomboon, 2012; Chairat et al., 2015).

The concept of conservation-oriented tourism emerged from two converging trends: the conservation trend and the trend regarding changes in the tourism industry. The significant essence of the conservation trend stemmed from an increase in public awareness and economic downturns in several countries. Development activities such as deforestation, mining, and agriculture occurred extensively in general areas, severely impacting ecosystems, and leading to environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources. Consequently, unsustainable economic development ensued, prompting various countries to strive towards integrating conservation with economic development.

The Fundamental Concepts and Principles of Sustainable Tourism

Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research (2016) outlines the fundamental concepts and principles of sustainable tourism as follows:

- 1) Tourism within natural, cultural, and historical destinations that possess unique local characteristics and value within that area.
- 2) Responsible tourism management that ensures sustainability, minimizes environmental impacts, and promotes the enduring preservation of the tourism site's environmental quality.
- 3) Tourism that involves learning processes and educational activities about the ecosystem and environment of the tourism site, aiming to enrich knowledge, impressions, and valuable experiences, fostering accurate awareness and consciousness among both local tourists and involved stakeholders.
- 4) Tourism contributing to income distribution at both local and national levels by emphasizing the participation of local communities in various service sectors, aiming to generate more benefits for the local area than conventional tourism practices in the past.

Related Studies

Imiwat et al. (2019) conducted a study on historical and cultural community tourism management innovation in line with the Pracharat approach in Wiang Chai, Chiang Rai, Thailand. The research objectives were: 1) to explore data on the historical sources and cultural communities in Wiang Chai, 2) to examine collaborative efforts in line with the democratic approach in managing historical and cultural community tourism in Wiang Chai, and 3) to

synthesize approaches and activities for historical and cultural community tourism in Wiang Chai, utilizing an integrated research methodology. The researchers employed a mixed-method research approach, combining qualitative research methods involving group discussions with individuals involved in tourism management and quantitative research methods, utilizing surveys with a sample population residing near the tourist attractions in Wiang Chai. The research findings on historical and cultural community tourism management in Wiang Chai revealed eight key points: 1) Tourism policy establishment. 2) Capacity for systematic tourism planning and management. 3) Community understanding of tourism. 4) Collaboration with grassroots networks. 5) Community's ability to accommodate tourists. 6) Capability enhancement for competition. 7) Strengthening community resilience. 8) Tourism destination development. These findings resulted from a co-creation synthesis involving governmental, private, and public sectors based on the concept of 'collaborative thinking, planning, implementation, responsibility sharing, and mutual benefits'. Additionally, the research outlined four strategic approaches for historical and cultural community tourism management in Wiang Chai, namely: 1) Public relations approaches. 2) Tourism management strategies. 3) Conservation and cultural restoration approaches. 4) Shared benefits strategies. These strategies aimed to instill pride and preserve local historical and cultural tourism resources as their own assets.

Komil (2010), the objectives were to examine tourists' opinions regarding conservation-oriented tourism management and to investigate the conservation-oriented tourism model in Ban Wang Nam Mok, Nong Khai, Thailand. The research utilized surveys with tourists and in-depth interviews with involved community members as research tools. Data analysis involved percentages and content analysis for narrative characteristics. The study found that: Tourists were predominantly females aged 16-25, mostly with a bachelor's degree, from the northeastern region. They visited for relaxation and mostly traveled by private cars, staying with friends or colleagues. Most were repeat visitors, staying 2-3 days per visit, spending over 1,000 Baht per person on average. Tourists' suggestions for conservation-oriented tourism management included a desire for traditional massage services, spa treatments, clearer signage, and informative signs about each tourist attraction. The conservation-oriented tourism model observed was a homestay program, utilizing community natural resources as a selling point. Tourists were accommodated, and fees were collected accordingly, contributing to sustainable community living. The community actively participated in all stages of tourism, resulting in increased income, heightened awareness of natural resources, and a desire for conservation. For the development of conservation-oriented tourism models, action should be taken in three main areas: Accommodation improvement by upgrading facilities and waste management. Improving tourist sites and services by clearer signage and introducing massage and spa services. Continuous education and training for staff in environmental tourism management to establish a systematic and sustainable approach. Furthermore, encouraging children and youth involvement is crucial for them to inherit and contribute to the continuity of conservation-oriented tourism management practices.

Sutthaphakdee (2016) conducted a study on the guidelines for developing innovations to manage tourism in the Rim Kwan community, Phayao, Thailand. The objectives were to study decision-making behaviors and attitudes of tourists visiting the Rim Kwan area, examine the tourism potential of the Rim Kwan community, and find innovative ways for tourism management involving community and local government participation to align with tourist demands, aiming to distribute tourism income to the region. The data was collected through in-depth interviews with three sample groups: tourists who had visited Rim Kwan, tourists who had never been to Rim Kwan, and business operators associated with local tourism. The study revealed that tourists visiting Rim Kwan were often not there by personal choice but rather accompanied by local friends or as a stopover route to other destinations. Those who had not

visited Rim Kwan expressed limited awareness of its tourism offerings compared to other tourist spots in the province. Rim Kwan faced challenges in attracting tourists due to short-duration activities that did not allow visitors to actively engage and prolong their stay. Consequently, some hoteliers suffered income loss due to a higher hotel-to-tourist ratio and the lack of interconnectivity among tourists. The recommended actions for Phayao include forming alliances among tourism-related businesses to create a network that promotes a unified brand for Rim Kwan. This can be achieved through storytelling, historical narratives, and innovative tourism activities that offer a fresh perspective on Rim Kwan. Additionally, establishing a centralized website to promote tourism in Rim Kwan to potential tourists who have not visited before would provide them with comprehensive decision-making information and confidence that choosing Phayao as a tourist destination.

Khammaddee & Aussawariyathipat (2016) conducted a research study on the factors influencing ecotourism among youth tourists in Chonburi, Thailand. The objective was to study and compare factors affecting ecotourism among youth tourists in Chonburi. The sample group comprised 400 youth tourists in Chonburi. The data collection utilized a survey instrument with a 5 - level Likert scale. The research findings revealed: 1) Overall, the factors influencing ecotourism among youth tourists were significant. 2) When comparing these factors among ecotourists: 2.1) There were statistically significant differences in the factors influencing ecotourism between male and female ecotourists at a significance level of 0.05. 2.2) There were no statistically significant differences in the factors influencing ecotourism among ecotourists of different ages, educational levels, occupations, and average monthly incomes.

Sertsri (2015) conducted a study on sustainable tourism management strategies in the Khlong Khon community, Samut Songkhram, Thailand. The objectives were: 1) To understand the identity of the Khlong Khon community in the context of sustainable tourism management. 2) To examine the tourism management processes and activities that align with the community's sustainable development approach. 3) To propose strategies for the sustainable development and management of tourism in the Khlong Khon community. The research employed a mixed-method approach, gathering data through questionnaires from 361 community members and conducting interviews with government officials, private sector representatives, and local tourism operators. Data analysis utilized content analysis and summarization of interview results. Key findings from the study included: 1) Identity of the Khlong Khon Community, the community's identity encompassed three main aspects: Rich historical heritage and cultural roots, a way of life intricately connected with the waterways, Abundant mangrove forests. 2) Suitable tourism management processes and activities such as: identified tourism activities and processes suitable for the community included capacity building to foster the community's role as a learning center through tourism-related activities, specific tourist activities such as mangrove reforestation, boat tours showcasing the local way of life, kayaking, and other engaging activities like collecting shellfish and feeding local wildlife. 3. Strategies for sustainable tourism development and management: prioritizing the conservation of mangrove forests within the community, instilling a sense of environmental consciousness among locals, adopting the principles of a self-sufficient economy to enhance community well-being, the study proposed strategies aiming to integrate sustainable tourism practices into the community, emphasizing environmental preservation, community awareness, and a balanced economic approach that enhances local livelihoods while safeguarding the environment.

Pongsakornrungsilp (2014) conducted a study on the Management of Sustainable Community-Based Tourism: The Case of Ban Kokekrai, Phang Nga, Thailand. The findings revealed that the potential of sustainable tourism lies in the sustainable thought process. The community places higher importance on conserving natural resources and the sustainability of tourism resources over emphasizing immediate benefits. They utilize tourism as a tool for conserving

natural resources and the environment, thereby promoting and driving the sustainable growth of the community involved in tourism activities.

Research Framework

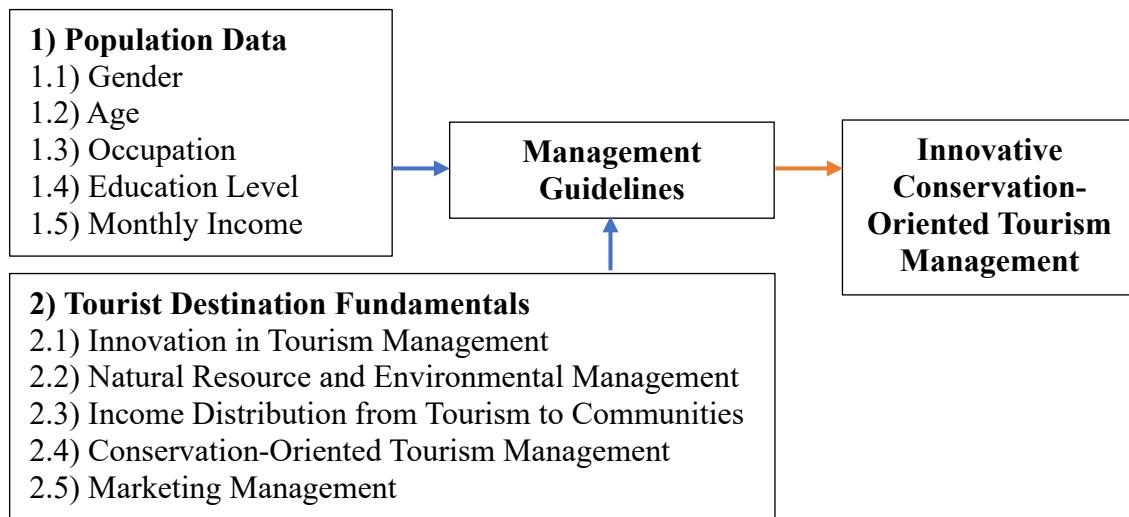


Figure 1 Research Framework on the Innovative Conservation-Oriented Tourism Management of the Community Groups Talo Makon Dam at Ban Bike, Yala, Thailand.

Methodology

Population and Sample

The sample in this research consists of Thai tourists who visited the Community Groups Talo Makon Dam at Ban Bike, Yala, Thailand. The sample size is 400 individuals, determined using the Taro Yamane.

Research Tool

The questionnaire was assessed on a 5-point scale, gathering data regarding the opinions of tourists at the Community Groups Talo Makon Dam. The questionnaire is developed from relevant research and tailored to align with the research objectives. It comprises five sections: Section 1: General respondent information, consisting of 5 questions.

Section 2 : Satisfaction levels across 5 aspects of tourism management, which include: 1) Innovation in tourism management, 2) Management of natural resources, 3) Costs and income distribution from conservation-oriented tourism, 4) Conservation-oriented tourism management, and 5) Marketing management, totaling 24 questions.

Section 3: Other suggestions and recommendations.

Data Analysis and Statistics

The data analysis for this research is divided into three parts, employing statistical processing methods using computer software. The statistics used for data analysis are chosen to align with the data characteristics and meet the research objectives:

- 1) Personal characteristic data of tourists, including gender, age, education level, occupation, and income, will be analyzed using frequency and percentage.
- 2) Tourists' opinions regarding the development of conservation-oriented tourism will be analyzed using statistics such as mean and standard deviation.

Result Analysis

Preliminary data analysis reveals that most respondents visiting the Community Groups Talo Makon Dam are predominantly female. The highest number falls within the age group below 20 years old, while the least number belongs to the age group of 41-50 years old. The most represented occupational group is students, followed by those in the sales sector and other

miscellaneous occupations. Regarding education levels, the highest representation is from individuals who completed high school, followed by those with a bachelor's degree and other lower educational levels. The highest reported monthly income is below 3,000 Baht, followed by the range of 4,000-8,000 Baht, with other income ranges having the least representation.

2) The study on tourists' opinions regarding the potential of the Community Groups Talo Makon Dam tourism destination across five dimensions: 1) innovation in tourism management, 2) natural resource management, 3) cost and income distribution from conservation tourism, 4) conservation-oriented tourism management, and 5) marketing management, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Tourists' perceptions of the overall potential of tourism at the Talo Makon Dam

Tourists' Opinions on the Talo Makon Dam	\bar{x}	S.D.	Point	Rank
2.1) Innovation in Tourism Management	4.24	.679	Strongly Agree	4
2.2) Natural Resource and Environmental Management	4.29	.651	Strongly Agree	2
2.3) Income Distribution from Tourism to Communities	4.27	.518	Strongly Agree	3
2.4) Conservation-Oriented Tourism Management	4.39	.579	Strongly Agree	1
2.5) Marketing Management	4.24	.679	Strongly Agree	5
Total	4.28	.621	Strongly Agree	

Table 1 indicates that tourists' perceptions of the overall potential of tourism at the Talo Makon Dam are at the highest level ($\bar{x} = 4.28$, S.D. = .621). When considering individual aspects, the average ratings range from highest to lowest as follows:

- 1) In terms of conservation-oriented tourism management, upon considering specific issues, the highest-rated perceptions are related to the conservation and enhancement of the dam's strengths ($\bar{x} = 4.57$, S.D. = .620). Following this, there are high ratings for the establishment of tourist management systems, the creation of tourism-related databases, the establishment of a central organization for dam tourism management, and the formulation of comprehensive tourism strategies, with ratings of ($\bar{x} = 4.46$, S.D. = .618), ($\bar{x} = 4.41$, S.D. = .619), ($\bar{x} = 4.03$, S.D. = .519), and ($\bar{x} = 4.29$, S.D. = .519), respectively.
- 2) Regarding natural resource and environmental management, upon considering specific aspects, the highest-rated perception is related to parking organization ($\bar{x} = 4.41$, S.D. = .619). Following this, there are high ratings for air and noise quality management at tourism sites, refurbishing various points within the dam area to enhance their quality for connecting conservation-based tourism, and sustaining water quality management, with ratings of ($\bar{x} = 4.33$, S.D. = .504), ($\bar{x} = 4.32$, S.D. = .595), ($\bar{x} = 4.23$, S.D. = .590) respectively, in that order. Waste management at tourist sites is also rated highly ($\bar{x} = 4.16$, S.D. = .587).
- 3) Concerning costs and the distribution of tourism-generated income to communities, upon scrutinizing the various aspects, the highest-rated perception is confidence and safety provided by security personnel in tourism areas ($\bar{x} = 4.50$, S.D. = .520). Subsequently, there's a high rating for tourism's role in bolstering community income and establishing medium to small-scale tourism businesses ($\bar{x} = 4.29$, S.D. = .519), ($\bar{x} = 4.26$, S.D. = .519). Additionally, tourism generating employment for locals and the high cost of promotional advertising (e.g., media advertising) are also rated at a high level ($\bar{x} = 4.19$, S.D. = .518), respectively.
- 4) Concerning tourism management innovation, when considering specific aspects, it is found that the highest-rated perception is that relevant personnel should receive appropriate training to enhance operational efficiency, which is at the highest level ($\bar{x} = 4.34$, S.D. = .595). Following this, providing channels and facilities for accessing tourism information using QR codes is also rated at the highest level ($\bar{x} = 4.33$, S.D. = .591). Additionally, the innovation's

potential to serve as a representation in tourism practices and to encourage tourists and community members to access technology to better adapt to modern society is rated highly ($\bar{x} = 4.18$, S.D. = .582), ($\bar{x} = 4.09$, S.D. = .584), respectively.

5) In terms of marketing management, considering specific areas, it's found that comprehensive marketing planning is perceived at the highest level ($\bar{x} = 4.39$, S.D. = .519). Following this, activities such as publicity promoting conservation tourism, creating an international tourism image, studying target tourist groups, and devising competitive strategies are also rated at the highest level ($\bar{x} = 4.36$, S.D. = .519), ($\bar{x} = 4.31$, S.D. = .519), ($\bar{x} = 4.28$, S.D. = .519), respectively, in that order. However, the establishment of a tourism-linked networking system is rated as high ($\bar{x} = 3.92$, S.D. = .517).

Conclusion and Discussion

From this research, an analysis of the general characteristics of respondents reveals several insights. The sample group of tourists visiting the Talo Makon Dam skews predominantly female rather than male. The age group under 20 years old constitutes the largest segment, while those between 41 and 50 years old represent the smallest. The occupations with the highest frequency are students, followed by those in sales/business, and the least represented are employees or company workers. In terms of education, high school graduates or equivalent hold the majority, followed by bachelor's degree holders, while those with an associate's degree or equivalent are the least represented. Concerning income, individuals earning below 3,000 Baht per month form the largest segment, while those earning between 4,000 and 8,000 Baht per month follow. Furthermore, the Talo Makon Dam is situated in a community area that offers limited tourism amenities but still provides essential public services such as eateries, public restrooms, parking facilities, and security measures. Additionally, it boasts natural water sources.

From this study, it was observed that the eco-tourism management innovations within the Community Groups Talo Makon Dam are at a notably high level. The highest-rated area is tourism conservation management, followed by natural resource and environmental management, revenue distribution and tourism impact on the community, tourism management innovation, and marketing management. This might be attributed to the Talo Makon Dam community's inherent richness in natural resources, making it suitable for eco-tourism. This significance given by the community toward developing itself as a tourism destination is supported by leaders who advocate for comprehensive development. They ensure the provision of essential public services, such as roads and a complete safety system. This aligns with Suwannal et al. (2022) research on community-based environmental tourism management, emphasizing local people's awareness and the community's connection to tourism. The research further discusses the significance of community life, local culture, and the community's associated lifestyle regarding tourism and sustainability. It emphasizes the balance and needs of local communities while highlighting their capacity to engage in participatory, reasoned, and lifestyle-compatible tourism. The diverse natural resource-based tourism systems in Thailand include diverse forest ecosystems, local culture, and lifestyles closely linked to the natural environment. These factors strengthen distinctive and remarkable tourism, incorporating cultural and lifestyle dimensions into nature-based tourism systems.

Suggestions

The study recommends an exploration of the potential of local agencies or organizations that play a role in the development of eco-tourism within the Community Groups Talo Makon Dam. Additionally, it's advised to investigate the creation of plans and guidelines for the eco-tourism development of the Community Groups Talo Makon Dam.

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