

ACCOMMODATION MANAGEMENT FOR INTEGRATED SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This research was aimed at defining accommodation businesses' crises and management guidelines, by adapting the concept of participatory action research model or PAR model, for 25 accommodation entrepreneurs in Ubolrat district, KhonKaen province, Thailand. Data collocation was investigated from questionnaires, site surveys, in-depth interviews, and brainstorming with the accommodation owners and key policy-makers at district and provincial level. The research results indicated that the root cause of the declining tourism situation at the site was due to the owners' use of low-price strategy for their business competition which seriously affected the accommodation standards and tourists' satisfaction. Therefore, to solve both accommodation businesses and tourism problems sustainably, all entrepreneurs decided to establish and take part in an accommodation club in the district; i.e. set up accommodation standard guidelines and business networking strategy.

Keywords: accommodation management, participatory action research, sustainable tourism.

1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, tourism development is concerned with sustainability and positive impacts on local communities. Though, realistically tourism implementation is difficult and tourism policy planners should emphasize their significant goals. According to the Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals contributed by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) [1] in Madrid, Spain, as well as the growth of Thailand's tourism industry, this research aimed to analyse accommodation businesses' crises and their solutions amid a case study pertaining to Ubolrat district, Khon Kaen province, Thailand. Ubolrat district is an important area of Khon Kaen province which is in the northeastern part of Thailand. Also, it is a well known tourism destination boasting water-sports, a golf course, national parks and traditional culture. However, in the previous decade, the tourism situation in this area has been declining continuously which has created cumulated conflicts between key stakeholders.

Therefore, this research was focused on the finding of possible solutions for the current tourism situation in addition to ways of sustaining benefits to local communities' quality of life as well as the surviving of accommodation businesses. In order to fulfill the goals, the appropriate research method was a participatory action research which began with the analysis of the real problems by engaging all the key stakeholders into the whole research processes in addition to problem-solving. The success of this research was also applied as one of the sustainable tourism development models for similar community-based tourism destinations in the provincial context.



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2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainable tourism

Due to the growth of mass tourism and the convenience of travel and information reach, many destinations have been developed and destroyed by tourists and tourism managers. Mowforth & Munt [2] suggested that to create sustainability in tourism, managers should be concerned with the criteria of participation by locals, aid to conservation, culture, society, environment, economy and education. In the Asia-Pacific context, cultural tourism and ecotourism were represented. At the same time, tourism was introduced to tourists, all tourism businesses and services were established and expanded uncontrollably. Especially in Thailand, Pleumarom [3] mentioned that the impacts of mass tourism were disproportionate to construction and infrastructure as well as the promotion of over-consumption of local resources giving rise to 'spoilt' destinations. Hence, to enhance sustainability in tourism, it is necessary to ensure that tourism development plans balance economic goals and conservation goals simultaneously [1, 4].

Meanwhile, community-based tourism in Thailand was promoted as a tool to sustain tourism resources and increase local residents' quality of life [5]. Furthermore, Okazaki [6] mentioned that the concept of community-based tourism concerns not only tourism sustainability but also community participation. He defined that community participation should provide the sharing of knowledge and opportunities of self-development by involving all stakeholders. Accordingly, this would include local government officials, local citizens, architects, developers, business people, and planners in the decision-making process. Consequently, to make use of community-based tourism to fulfill the goal of tourism sustainability, Pathumporn [7] suggested that tourism planners should emphasize on (1) people: all key stakeholders ought to be engaged in the tourism implementation; (2) process: the tourism implementation plan and process needs to be based on the key stakeholders' objectives and requirements; and (3) participatory: all key stakeholders need to take part from the planning level and participate as a network for sustainable tourism development.

2.2 Participatory action research

Green *et al.* [8] defined the term 'participatory research' as the systematic collection of data for analysing and practice for changes and developments. What's more, Kemmis & McTaggart [9] mentioned that a participatory action research is a philosophy of social research focusing on community development, social change and human rights in the study area. They also stated that other terms relating to this method could be referred to as 'shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems or an orientation toward community action'. The aforementioned consist of many spirals or circles in the study starting from: planning a change; acting and observing the process as well as consequences of the change; reflecting on these processes and consequences; replanning; acting and observing again; reflecting again, and so on. Kindon *et al.* [10] also argued that participatory data analysis varies and is dependent on the situation and the negotiated process. Similarly, Capriello [11] mentioned that 'researchers need to focus on observing reality and merely recognizing the causes of failure in destinations' alliances to playing an active role in identifying concrete actions that would facilitate collaboration between stakeholders'.

3 METHODS

3.1 Data sources and collection

Important data were investigated from both qualitative and quantitative tools. Data were then subsequently applied to the research results for tourism implementation in each circle by adapting the concept of the PAR Model [9, 10] which was divided into four steps for each circle: planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

The PAR model amid this study consists of three circles: (1) educating of sustainable tourism, accommodation standards and management for accommodation entrepreneurs in order to have the same understanding; the investigation of the tourism situation, the entrepreneurs' needs and business models; (2) the analysis of tourists' satisfaction, accommodation capacities and standard evaluation regarding the national accommodation standards of Thailand Tourism Department; (3) the policy development and practice of sustainable tourism at the site and participated in application of sustainable accommodation management and networking. The accommodation management for sustainable tourism development in each circle of the PAR model (as shown in Figure 1) is based on research findings from 390 questionnaires of tourists' satisfaction, site surveys covering 68 villages, in-depth interviews with local residents in 65 places of interest, seven-time brainstorming with key policy-makers from 17 government organizations and lastly, 25 accommodation entrepreneurs at the district and provincial level.

3.2 Data analysis methods

Regarding the research process of the study: a mixed method research, data analysis occurred in every circle of the PAR model altogether with the implementation of the results. Qualitative data were analysed via content analysis and triangulation rechecked altogether with descriptive statistic analysis for the quantitative data. Following that, all data were implemented for SWOT Analysis to prepare guidelines for business marketing strategies, sustainable tourism policy planning and practice.

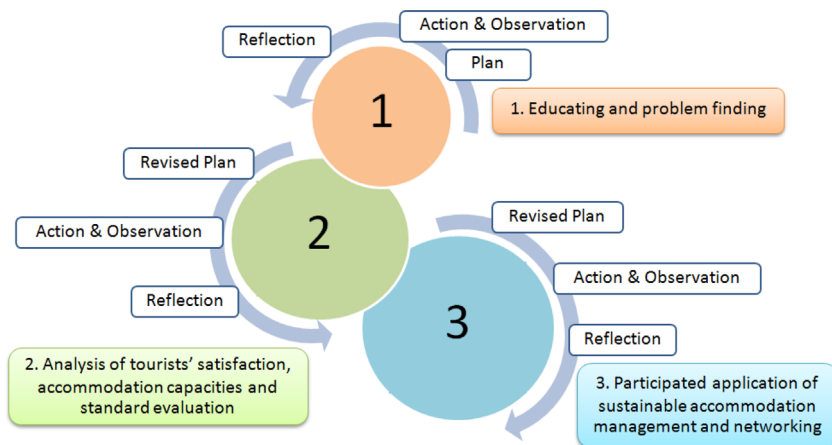


Figure 1: The PAR Model for Community-Based Tourism Development.

Source: Adapted from [9, 10].

Table 1: Tourists' Satisfaction.

Tourists' satisfaction	M	SD	Level
1. Physical evidence			
1.1 Product/Accommodation			
Accommodation image	2.92	0.84	Medium
Variety of room types	3.11	0.86	Medium
Modern amenities and facilities	3.20	0.82	Medium
Inside and outside decoration	3.26	0.95	Medium
Service area zoning or separation	3.15	0.94	Medium
Accommodation and room cleanliness	3.22	0.95	Medium
Security	3.13	0.89	Medium
Total	3.14	0.89	Medium
1.2 Location and accessibility			
Ease of access	3.14	0.88	Medium
Close to nearby attractions, business areas or shopping areas	2.94	0.89	Medium
Clear direction signage	2.95	0.88	Medium
Total	3.01	0.89	Medium
2. Pricing			
Price standards	3.06	0.91	Medium
Reasonable pricing	3.15	0.84	Medium
Cheaper price than nearby accommodations	3.07	0.86	Medium
Total	3.09	0.87	Medium
3. Distribution channels			
Various sources of information and reservations	3.04	0.81	Medium
Total	3.04	0.81	Medium
4. Marketing promotion			
Year-round sales promotions	2.65	0.93	Medium
Marketing promotions with other tour programs	2.72	0.90	Medium
Total	2.69	0.92	Medium
5. Service process			
5.1 Staff			
Hospitality	3.13	0.83	Medium
Timely service	3.09	0.86	Medium

(continued)

Tourists' satisfaction	M	SD	Level
Knowledgeable and skilled in service giving	3.06	0.90	Medium
Knowing and understanding customer needs	3.09	0.87	Medium
Desirable number of staff compared with customers	3.09	0.86	Medium
Total	3.09	0.86	Medium
5.2 Room			
Readiness for service	3.17	0.88	Medium
Full amenities	3.22	0.97	Medium
Cleanliness and odor	3.26	0.96	Medium
Complete facilities and equipment	3.33	0.95	Medium
Total	3.25	0.94	Medium
6. Service experience			
Your service experience from the accommodation	3.24	0.92	Medium
Total	3.24	0.92	Medium

4 RESULTS

The qualitative and quantitative data collocation were investigated from questionnaires, site surveys, in-depth interviews, and brainstorming with the accommodation owners and key stakeholders in the district and provincial level in each circle of the PAR model. The critical findings of research results are described in four topics as per the following:

4.1 Investigation of problems findings and analysis of tourism situation and accommodation business models

4.1.1 Tourism situation

To understand the situation and reality of the current collaboration, the first step of the research was started with the problem investigations separated into two main parts. These parts were, firstly, educating of sustainable tourism, accommodation standards and secondly, management for accommodation entrepreneurs to possess the same understanding, the investigation of tourism situation, the entrepreneurs' needs and their business models.

For the problems and tourism situation analysis in the first circle of the PAR model, the data were collected via brainstorming with local residents, key policy-makers and tourism entrepreneurs in the district. It was found that the tourism situation at the site had been declining, the numbers of visitors had been decreasing, and there were some serious conflicts between the local residents and tourism-related business people. The causes of this serious situation were business-related competition, over-consumption of tourism resources and development the of new tourism destinations in neighbouring districts. Moreover, the research teams, key policy-planners and national park officers also surveyed current tourism destinations located in nearby districts and inspected a further 65 interesting places. The results indicated that the district met problems with over-consumption in the current destinations, uninteresting activities, conflicts between business sectors, and the lack of new tourism destination developments and support.

Hence, the discussions pertaining to the solutions and tourism rejuvenation occurred in the second-time brainstorming between the research teams, local residents, tourism entrepreneurs, tourism policy-makers and national park boards. For this stage, all stakeholders agreed to solve the problems and plan for tourism policies based on sustainability concerning local residents' benefits and resource capacity with their integrated collaboration and budget sharing.

4.1.2 Accommodation business models

In reference to the brainstorming taking place with 25 accommodation entrepreneurs - based on the tourism situation, business problems, their response to the situation and their needs, it was indicated that there were 6 main issues as follows:

- The accommodation entrepreneurs had run their businesses without knowledge of accommodation business management and the tourism industry.

Table 2: SWOT analysis.

Situation analysis

Strengths

1. Main tourist attraction of the province
2. Variety of tourism resources
3. Unique life style and traditions
4. Ease of connection to surrounding tourist destinations
5. High numbers of tourism business investments, i.e. restaurants, accommodation or boating
6. Strength of local government and politics
7. Center of regional government organizations, universities, private associations and consular offices

Weaknesses

1. Negative tourism image
2. High negative tourism impacts
3. High level of business competition and conflict
4. Low standards of accommodations and services

Opportunities

1. Changes in national and provincial tourism strategies
2. Development of Asian highway and logistic systems
3. Increasing number of foreign visitors

Threats

1. Unstable political situation
 2. No international direct flights
 3. Changes in tourists' behaviors and trends
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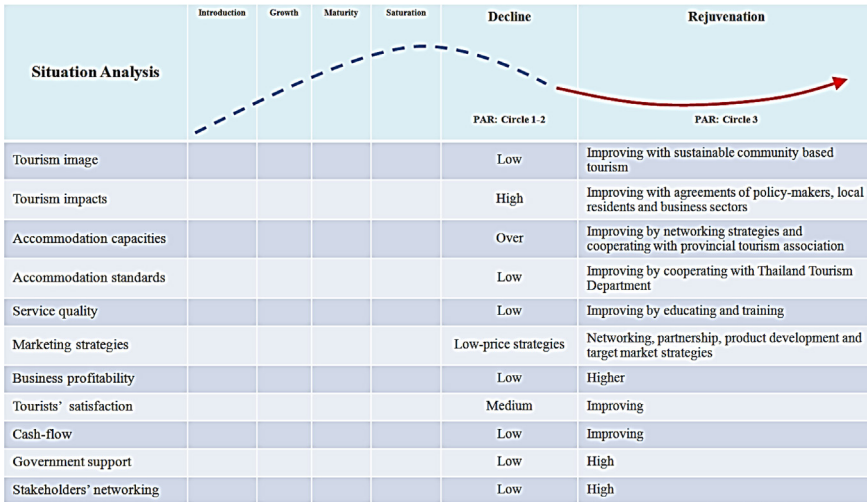


Figure 2: Situation Analysis.

Source: Adapted from Butler [14] and Buhalis [15]

- The entrepreneurs had no experience on accommodation business management and accommodation standards.
- The entrepreneurs had never analysed the tourism situation, tourists' behavior and satisfaction, tourism marketing trends, nor target markets. The number of accommodation facilities at the site was over and above the amount of over-night tourists which also had the tendency to decrease. Almost all of the entrepreneurs were associated with small and medium business (two or three-star accommodation) and had invested in their businesses with bank loans. Additionally, they had problems with cash-flow. Business competition was fierce, and the entrepreneurs needed to cut down their standard price to get customers and income without concern for business costs, service standards and tourists' satisfaction.

Consequently, these problems seriously affected their business circles continuously until their businesses became defunct.

4.2 Analysis of tourists' satisfaction, accommodation capacities and accommodation standards

According to the survey of tourists' satisfaction on accommodation capacities and standards by applying the guidance of the Thailand Tourism Department [12, 13], from 390 questionnaires, it was found that the majority of respondents were female; place of residence was either in the northeastern or central region of Thailand. Respondents' ages were lower than 25 years, 26–35 years and 36–45 years. Consequently; most respondents' education level was bachelor's degree; respondents' occupations were students, business employees, business owners and government/public enterprise staff. Monthly income was less than 40,000 Thai Baht or approximately 1,200 USD; numbers of visits was 1–3 times. Most respondents had travelled with friends, family members or relatives; durations of stay were 1–2 nights and 3–4

nights equally. Sources of information as well as reservations were via the internet, direct-call and walk-in. Respondents' satisfaction in terms of accommodation capacities and standards: physical evidence, pricing, distribution channels, marketing promotion, service process, and service experience were at the medium-level (as shown in Table 1). Moreover, the results also indicated that the accommodation entrepreneurs needed to be concerned with the physical evidence and marketing as follows:

Apart from the quantitative survey, the data collections were investigated from site survey and in-depth interviews with 25 accommodation entrepreneurs. Standard evaluation was applied from the accommodation standard guidance of Thailand Tourism Department. The findings indicated that for the most part, accommodations at the site were 2–3 stars resorts, which were built without well-prepared construction plans as for hotels, there was one 4-star hotel. Additionally, the services in the accommodations were not planned according to tourists' needs and international service standards. Therefore, the accommodation image was at a critically troubled level. Nevertheless, on the other hand, some of the accommodation businesses exhibited unique selling points, design and decoration, and exact target markets. Those businesses included the Ruen Araya Resort, Varea Valley Resort and Little Box Hotel.

4.3 Situation analysis of tourism sustainability and accommodation business at the site

With reference to the data investigation from demand and supply sides – the significant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of sustainable tourism and accommodation management at the site were revealed accordingly:

4.4 Participated application of sustainable accommodation management and networking

According to the research results and SWOT analysis, it was indicated that the root cause of the declining tourism situation at the site were due to the accommodation business owners lack of business and marketing plans based on tourism situation analysis as well as the use of low-price strategy for their business competition which gravely affected accommodation standards and tourists' satisfaction. Therefore, to rejuvenate both the accommodation businesses and tourism problems sustainably, all entrepreneurs decided to establish and take part in an accommodation club in the district. Subsequently they established accommodation standards guidelines and made use of business networking strategy by cooperating with policy-makers, local residents and the provincial tourism association (as shown in Figure 2). The participation-based planning and networking between key-stakeholders has been improving the tourism situation and their businesses have been able to finally survive.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In reference to the concept of PAR model [8–11], tourism development and marketing [14, 15] in addition to the study results, these indications show that a participatory action research is one approach method to reach realistic sustainable tourism development as well as business goals. Meanwhile, the difficulty of the research design was dependent upon the tourism situation in the study area and the possibility of a negotiation process between tourism business sectors and key-stakeholders. Notwithstanding, the three circles of the PAR model of accommodation management for integrated sustainable tourism management could be the basic concept and adapted to other destinations in a similar context. Researchers and tourism planners could start the initial stage from the investigation of problem finding, development

needs and analysis of the tourism and business situation at the site. Following on from that, engage all key-stakeholders to plan and implement concrete sustainable tourism practice based on the study results; finally, there should be an evaluation of the sustainable tourism development, business achievement and plan revising as the continuous sustainable development spirals.

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