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Cultural values (power distance) impact on the stakeholders' engagement in organizing the Monsoon Cup international sailing event

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore the unique cultural values (power distance) among the residents and organisers (government and Event Company) in organising the Monsoon Cup event. A qualitative research method was chosen for this study and data was collected by way of a number of in-depth semi-structured interviews through purposive and snowball samplings. The collected data was analysed using thematic content analysis. The findings from this study revealed that examining power distance issues had explained the relationship, perceived power and communication between the organisers and local residents.

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1. Introduction

The Monsoon Cup is an annual international yachting regatta, participated in by many of the world's top sailors. The event is held annually in Terengganu between November and January, and during the monsoon season. The

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Monsoon Cup is part of the World Match Racing Tour and serves as the Malaysian leg for this prestigious international sailing event. Since its inception in the year 2005, many issues and problems have been reported in the local newspapers. The local residents have not been informed about the planning and infrastructure development for the purpose of organizing the Monsoon Cup. The government did not ask for their opinion, views, comments and sharing of information with regards to the event. In relation to Malaysian local cultural and values, Din (1997) explained that input from the host community is often not seriously considered and seen to be practically irrelevant to the planning process. In the case of the Monsoon Cup event, the arisen issues about the event organization resemble the concept of power distance (PDI) as identified by Hofstede (1980). Power Distance Index (PDI) is defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 1994, p. 28). It stands to reason that residents should be involved in the decision making process and details need to be shared and discussed between local government, organizers and residents so that common consensus can be reached. This study is significant as it helps to understand the concept of power distance within Malaysian society with regards to developing a better communication, relationship and engagement among stakeholders involved in the organization of an event.

1.1. Power theory

Power is originally defined by Dahl (1957, p.201) as “a relationship between people, that some people have more power than the others.” Madrigal (1993) stated that, “a central component of social exchange theory is the power relationship between actors. Power refers to the ability of one actor to influence decision outcomes that will affect the other” (p. 338). The theory of power relations can be extended beyond individuals to include community groups (Reed, 1997). Ap (1992) suggested that the inclusion of the concept of power between stakeholders is necessary because power determines the exchange partner’s ability to take advantage of the outcome of the exchange. Ap (1992) and Kayat (2002) proposed that residents with lower levels of power are in a disadvantageous position than those with higher levels of power.

1.2. Power relations between stakeholders

Reed (1997) explained that it is important to determine whether an individual or groups are affected by the development, and who has sufficient capacity to participate. According to Reed (1997), in new and evolving tourism settings, a lack of institutional support for tourism may allow conventional power holders in the community to keep hold of their influence with making decisions and thus will act as constraints to collaboration. For instance, Reed (1997) stated that in several emergent tourism settings, municipal governments can become goal-oriented actors that use their power for their own purposes. Therefore, Reed (1997) suggested that power relations are seen as an important element in understanding the characteristics and consequences of community-based planning.

Mitchell and Reid (2001) examined tourism planning and management in the Andean community of Taquile Island, Peru developed a framework to explore and describe power relationships, public unity, and collective awareness of tourism opportunities and management in a given community. They found that awareness, unity, and power are three important elements in the planning and implementation of community tourism policies in Taquile Island. They concluded that there was a relatively equitable distribution of economic benefits for Taquile residents, partially due to high community unity, local control or ownership, fair and balanced power structure and participation in decision making (Mitchell & Reid, 2001).

Beritelli and Laesser (2011) contended that power plays a central role in building the influence reputation of actors (leaders, individuals, and organizations) in a cooperative network which is significant for planning and decision making. They developed four power dimensions that are the determinants of influence reputation: (1) hierarchical position, reflecting vertical power, (2) knowledge and (3) process power, relating to the horizontal power that refers to individual’s position in a specific process/mechanism, and (4) assets (i.e. money, land), built on social exchange theory. Then, Nunkoo & Ramkissoon (2011) proposed that community power or what is broadly termed ‘community empowerment’ is an important tool to assist in the sustainable development of tourism industry. Empowerment is defined as, “An enhancing and energizing context-specific process that expands the feelings of trust and control in oneself as well as in one’s organization...” (Eylon, 1997, p. 375). Nevertheless, Nunkoo and

Ramkissoon (2011) argued that, community power is often undistributed among groups within the local community. As a result, the community often feels that they have no right to determine tourism policy at the planning stages of development.

Additionally, Hall (1994) had indicated about the importance of power relation between stakeholders in the development of tourism and the ways in which it is implemented (Hall, 1994). Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011) agreed with Hall (1994) that ‘power’ can influence the decision making process for tourism policy and have a negative/positive effect on overall community satisfaction and favorable attitudes. It can be argued that balance power distribution is important between stakeholders involved tourism policy making. In order to avoid local resentment, the views of local residents must be given a proper hearing, as provided for in the Structure Plan of 1976 and the Environmental Impact Assessment Procedures of 1988 (Kadir Din 1993a).

However, tourism in the developing country has commonly been seen as a double-edged sword; communities may augment their income or livelihood from tourism but unfortunately, the majority of benefits tend to flow away from them (Mitchell & Reid, 2001). Real power and decision-making regularly resides outside community control and influence (Reid & Sindiga, 1999). Thus, governments, practitioners and scholars in developing countries should have reinforced greater emphasis on community involvement and engagement in the planning and implementation of tourism development. In shaping event tourism organization in this region, the aspect of local cultural values need to be considered so as to understand the issues of comparative power between different stakeholder groups.

Cultural value dimension is about understanding how people behave and communicate across different cultures, how they deal with social life and human relationships, what difficulties they may have in relating to others, and what perceptions they may develop of others (Reisinger, 2009). The most widely utilized dimensions of a nation’s culture were identified by Hofstede (1980, 2001). One of the dimensions is Power Distance (PDI). He scored each country using a scale of roughly 0-100 for each dimension. The higher the score, the more that dimension is exhibited in society (Hofstede, 2001). According to Hofstede (2009), Malaysia is the largest Power Distance nation with an index score of (104).

1.3. Power distance

Power Distance Index (PDI) is defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 1994, p. 28). Power distance is one of Hofstede’s cultural value dimensions that measure the tendency of people to rely on leaders to take important decisions (Romm and Hsu, 2002). In cultures with a small power distance (e.g. Australia, Austria, Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand), people expect and accept power relations that are more consultative or democratic, and relate to one another more as equals regardless of their formal positions. In cultures with a large power distance (e.g., Malaysia, Guatemala, Panama, Philippines, Mexico, Venezuela, China) the less powerful accept power relations that are autocratic or paternalistic.

Norhashim and Aziz (2005) in their analysis of development practices in Malaysia observed that the citizen is amenable to the less than transparent business deals struck by entrepreneurs and government as a vehicle to develop the nation. Their study acknowledged the general public acquiescence to the norm of vested interest taking a greater cut of the economic pie as long as a sizeable benefit is distributed to the masses. Despite recognizing drawbacks of such practices the society still adheres to “...the Malay tendency to bow to authority and inherent servitude remains to this day”. This phenomenon of submitting to unequal distribution of authority, wealth, status corresponds perfectly to Hofstede’s (1994) explanation of a large Power Distance culture.

Another fitting example of large Power Distance practices in Malaysia is observations made by Williamson (2002) in his study of the social engineering attempted by the government. His reporting of the shrewdness of a long serving Malaysian Prime Minister who applied coercion by means of security apparatus to quell dissenting voices rather than through peaceful consultations personified another typical trait of a high scoring Power Distance nation as identified by Hofstede (2005).

Power distance is a moderator of empowerment and team participation which depends on the distribution of power (Zang & Begley, 2011). In a high power distance setting, team participation is not significantly impacted by empowerment (Zang & Begley, 2011) hence there is less opportunity for the local community to be empowered. On

the other hand, in a low power distance setting, there is positive relationship between empowerment and team participation (Zang& Begley, 2011).

In addition, Bramwell and Sharman (2000) suggested that because of the imbalance of power among residents, authorities and the private sector, there is a need to include various stakeholder groups in the planning process. Therefore, there is common agreement that collaboration can help overcome power imbalances by involving all stakeholders in the process that meets their needs (Reed, 1997).

Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011) agreed that institutional trust which comprises honesty, integrity, transparency, and competence needed to be promoted in all planning institutions attempting to gain and sustain public trust. The researchers also suggested that effective communication, provision of accurate information, and explanations of decisions taken are other effective strategies that tourism authorities need to implement to gain public institutional trust. Hence, balancing the distribution of power (Reed, 1997), may improve power relation, and enhance engagement and strong relationship between stakeholders which allow more opportunities for them to exchange views, uncover issues regarding the event (Aas, Ladkin & Fletcher, 2005). Hence, the objective of this research is to explore the unique cultural values (power distance) among the Malay residents and the organizers (government and Event Company) that may have impact on stakeholders' engagement to organize the Monsoon Cup event. The conceptual framework for this research is illustrated in Figure 1.

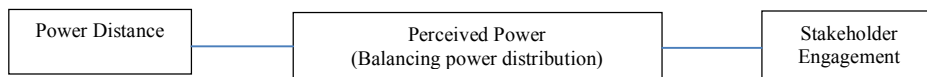


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

2. Methodology

For the purpose of achieving the objective of this study, a constructivism paradigm and a qualitative research approach were employed. Data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with the residents of Pulau Duyong, officials of the Federal and State government of Terengganu and the event company. A total of 50 respondents, comprising 36 local residents of Pulau Duyong and 14 respondents representing the organizers of the event (Ministry of Youth and Sport, Ministry of Tourism, Terengganu State's Tourism EXCO and T-Best Event Pty. Ltd.) were interviewed. They were selected through the process of purposive and snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted using two separate interview schedules for the different sampling frames (the organizers and residents). The reliability of the interview question was pilot tested and checked to ensure the rigour of the study. Thematic content analysis (Green & Thorogood, 2009) was used to analyze the transcribed data with the help of NVIVO 9.1 software.

3. Findings

The study found few themes which had emerged from the analysis of the interviews with the stakeholders involved in the research project.

3.1. Communication gap between the stakeholders

The federal government made the decisions to begin infrastructure development for the MC project without any explanation about the purpose of the project to the local residents and politicians. The Federal Government had already developed a master plan for the MC before it was announced. The local resident only found out about the MC project from the media. Hence, confusion and upheaval occurred between the residents because the decision to organize the MC event was made without initially informing and consulting them.

Imran commented that the MC project was agreed upon without any knowledge of, or an official agreement with the State Government. The idea and the decision were announced suddenly by the Federal to the State government. As Fahmi commented, "Local politicians were not called for the meeting to plan and organize the Monsoon Cup at

the policy or foundation level.” Saleh also shared a similar view: “In the beginning, the community representative was not informed at all. We didn’t know that there was going to be an international mega-event here.”

This finding is similar to a study by Sirakaya, Teye and Sonmez (2002), about a tourism development project at Cape Coast and Elmina in Ghana where residents were not aware of the nature of the project because they were excluded from the planning and decision making process. Sirakaya et al., (2002) concluded that the residents’ exclusion is common in developing countries which followed a top down development culture. Boyko (2008) presented similar findings that many residents felt ignored in the planning stages of the ‘Brugge 2002’ event in Belgium. She suggested that citizen involvement was important in the planning policy of an event. Conversely, Ritchie et al. (2009) found that the two respective communities of Weymouth and Portland in England had some influence over decisions made and could voice their opinions concerning 2012 London Olympic Games developments in their local community.

The findings from this study also support the work of Aas, Ladkin and Fletcher (2005) and Tosun (2000) and their assertion that some countries are still characterized by paternalistic, centralized, top-down bureaucratic political structures that make community participation difficult. It can be argued that there was a communication gap between the organizers and the residents even also between the Federal Government and State Government.

3.2. Opportunity for the residents to voice their opinions

This study found that the residents demonstrated that there were opportunities for residents to voice their views to the village’s chieftains (JKK) and to the community representatives. However, only good comments about the government were allowed to be published in the national media because Malaysian newspapers are controlled by the government. The negative comments were mainly published by the alternative media. On the other hand, community meetings with the village chieftains or the community representative was held seasonally, but only when certain issues arose. Nevertheless, discussions at the meeting did not accomplish any result because the community representatives were never invited by the organizing committee to join the logistic meeting for the annual MC event. Therefore, residents’ comments and opinions were only able to reach the community representative or also called ‘the Pulau Duyong’s Development Officer’. Both residents, Khairil and Salih shared similar opinions about the communication between the stakeholders. As Khairil said, “*The community representative is not even invited to any meeting in regard to the Monsoon Cup. It seems like there is no communication between the State Government and the Community Representative.*” Salih then commented, “The community can give their opinions to the community representative but if the community representative is not asked to join the meeting with the organizing committee (T-Best & State Government), there is no effect.” Another situation that existed was further explained by Mawi, “*If we complain to the JKKs and the Pulau Duyong’s Development Officer, they will not object to the government because they were appointed by the government, and if the Community Representative of the opposition party objects to any issue, it will be ignored totally.*”

3.3. Organizers’ view on residents’ opportunity to voice their opinions about the event

Most interviewees stated that the residents were able to voice their opinions to their JKKs (villages’ chieftains), who would then report their comments and opinions to the Community Representative or the Pulau Duyong Development Officer. The Community Representative would bring these comments or opinions to the State’s Legislative Assembly whereas the Pulau Duyong Development Officer could only report the matter to the State’s Tourism EXCO.

Moreover, many interviewees indicated that the residents could also provide their comments in writing to the community column in the local newspaper; and across all mass media such as radio, television as well as on the Internet. This study found that the residents demonstrated that there were opportunities for residents to voice their views to the village’s chieftains (JKK) and to the community representatives. Community meetings with the village chieftains or the community representative was held seasonally, but only when certain issues arose. However, discussions at the meeting did not accomplish any result because the community representatives were never invited by the organising committee to join the logistic meeting for the annual MC event. Therefore, residents’ views were

only able to reach the community representative or the Pulau Duyong's Development Officer. As Salih, a resident commented, "The community can give their opinions to the Community Representative but if the Community Representative is not called to join in the meeting with the organising committee (T-Best & State Government), there's no effect is it?"

More importantly, although the residents make complaints to the JKKs and the Pulau Duyong's Development Officer, it did not result in any changes. This was because the JKKs and the Pulau Duyong's Development Officer were reluctant to object to government policy and decision making because they themselves were appointed by the government. On the other hand, if residents make complaints to the community representative from the opposition party, it usually was ignored by the ruling or administrative government. This was because this event was organised and funded by the Federal Government.

The propensity for civil service bureaucrats in ignoring residents' grievances at their own level instead of relaying them up the channel display a typical trait of large Power Distance society. Rarely, if any, in large Power Distance nations, junior officers argue against their superiors (Hofstede, 1994). Authority in large Power Distance cultures is used to muzzling or even muscling opposing views. Consultation with citizens who hold dissenting views is almost unheard of. In a sense, this study finds duplication in a smaller scale of the observations made by Williamson (2002) in which political deception is used to frustrate the opposition.

3.4. *Barriers to contributing opinions or views about the MC*

Most interviewees stated that there were no barriers that stood in the way of resident opinions or views. However, there were some barriers that were mentioned by interviewees that prevented the flow of opinions or views from residents to the organisers or to the correct local authorities. The first major barrier which was mentioned by residents was that the JKKs did not want to report to the community representative from the opposition party, who was a member of the State's Legislative Assembly and could bring resident comments or opinions into the State Legislative Assembly. As Fahmi further explained, "*The JKKs do not want to report to the community representative of the Opposition party who can bring this matter into the State Legislative Assembly because the current JKKs are not his supporters.*"

A second barrier mentioned by one resident was that there were difficulties involved in information reaching a higher level even though the residents had voiced their concerns to JKKs and to Pulau Duyong's Development Officer/Community Representative. This was because there had been a communication failure between the State Government and the Pulau Duyong's Development Officer/Community Representative. Interestingly, Hakim explained that, "*The State's Tourism EXCO is expecting the Community Representative to come and approach him regarding the Monsoon Cup. On the other hand, the Community Representative is expecting the Tourism EXCO to send him an invitation letter to attend a meeting regarding the Monsoon Cup.*" Jamal stated that there was a solution, "The State's Secretariat should call the community representative to the meeting so that information can be exchanged, but now when we ask the community representative, they cannot do anything because they were not invited to any meeting."

3.5. *Organisers' views on residents' involvement in meetings for organising the MC*

According to most interviewees, the Community Representative or the Development Officer who represents the residents was only involved in the logistic meetings at the state level with the State's Tourism EXCO from 2006 to 2008. In the meetings, they discussed the logistic part of the event, that is, the side event activities such as community sport, sales carnival and the community feast. On the other hand, the technical part of the event was fully organised by the event organiser (T-Best Event) who was the expert in sailing sport. Furthermore, an organiser Farid admitted that changes occurred to resident involvement after 2008 as he stated, "*After 2008, the residents were informed about the event only from the media and the community representatives were only called to officiate in some programs associated with the side events.*"

One of the organisers suggested that the State's Secretariat should call the community representative into the meeting so that information could be exchanged. This suggestion was supported by (Hung et al., 2011) who found that locals' ability to access information was frequently dependent upon the willingness of the tourism authority to share information. Omar, a resident also admitted, "*At least as a community representative I can inform the*

residents about the Monsoon Cup but now I do not know what to answer if the residents question me about the Monsoon Cup because I have no information.”

3.6. Organiser's views on the importance of involving residents in organising the MC

Almost all interviewees agreed that it was important to involve the residents in organising the MC; however, they stated that it would depend on what level and in what way. As Seth (T-B) explained, *“Yes, it is important to involve them and get their participation in side events, but not at high level meetings.”* Moreover, Tahir (SG) initially denied the importance of residents' involvement by saying, *“Who are they? What outcome can they give?”* He then modified this comment by stating: *“If by involving them we can prevent conflicts and negative issues, then it's alright to involve them”*.

One of the reasons for involving the residents mentioned by Razak (FG) was so that the community representatives could obtain some information in relation to the MC event and share this information with local residents. Then, Yusuf (FG) stated another important reason that was, *“To ensure that there is dissemination of information in the communication between the organising committee and the local residents.”* Dissemination of information in communication is about sharing information horizontally among stakeholders (State Government, Event Company and Community Representative) so that can reduce or eliminate the power distance. A low power distance can avoid conflicts and misunderstandings; as well as can encourage better power relations among stakeholders. This statement was confirmed by Caffyn, Jobbins and Guy (2003) who found that stakeholder interactions need to be more open and meaningful and set within more balanced power distribution and have better communication systems.

Moreover, smooth communication between the government and residents could help avoid conflict and misunderstandings. Most importantly, involving the residents in organising the MC would provide opportunities for the organisers to hear the residents' favourable and unfavourable opinions. Hence, listening to the residents is one of the methods that they could use to gain their support. The above finding is consistent with the suggestion by Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011), that residents should be involved in some aspects of the decision making process. Empowering local residents in decision making can be an effective strategy to gain their positive perceptions and support (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011). Hence, listening to the residents is one of the methods that they could use to gain their support. Empowered residents have favourable attitudes and are supportive towards tourism projects (Kayat, 2002a).

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, all stakeholders agreed on the importance of disseminating information among all key stakeholders and to involve local residents organizing the event. It can also be concluded that power distance does have an impact on the relationship between the major stakeholders. According to Hofstede (1994), Malaysia is included as a high power distance country. A high power distance setting confirms that there is an unequal distribution of power issues among the stakeholders. The issue supports the fact that the community was not informed, consulted or invited to be involved in any meetings to discuss logistical matters about the MC event.

As explained by Yi and Begley (2011), power distance is a moderator of empowerment and team participation that depends on the distribution of power. In a high power distance setting, team participation does not impact significantly from empowerment (Yi and Begley, 2011) hence; there are few opportunities for the local community to be empowered. In the case of Malaysia which practices a centralized, top down bureaucratic political structure, a collaborative organizing approach is recommended. Additionally, more effective communication method is also recommended when organizing the MC event so as to reduce the power distance and improve the power relations between the organizers and the residents. Kayat (2002) indicated that powerful or empowered residents generally have favorable attitudes and are supportive toward tourism projects.

The implication for theory from this research was the use of the power distance concept in exploring the relationship and communication between the organizers and local residents. The findings showed that a low power distance setting can avoid conflicts and misunderstandings, and encourage better power relations between stakeholders with more ability to access information, and provide greater willingness to share information. Therefore, resident participation and collaboration can help to reduce the power distance and encourage a fairer

distribution of power between stakeholders involved so as to build up more effective communication between and within them.

With regards to implication for practice, this research will help to promote a transparent managing and organizing process for mega-events by employing virtuous worthy power relation between stakeholders who takes into account the resident's opinions, views and comments. Having detected pockets of residents who had declining support, indifference, alternative or opposition to the Monsoon Cup, it is recommended that the authorities bring these discontent groups into their fold.

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