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Tour operator perspectives on responsible tourism indicators of Kinabalu National Park, Sabah

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the tour operators' perspectives on responsible tourism indicators. The empirical assessment is undertaken at Kinabalu National Park, Sabah in Malaysia. In-depth interviews were carried out to capture the indicators for responsible tourism from tour operators' perspectives. 25 tour operators participated in this research. Four main principles of sustainable tourism were used as a topic guide during the interviews, which are ecological, economic, cultural and social. The findings of this paper discuss the underlying meaning of responsible tourism indicators from tour operators' perspectives.

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Keywords: tour operators' perspectives; Kinabalu National Park; principles of sustainability; responsible tourism indicators

1. Introduction

Tourism is a global industry with a bearing on the lives of millions of people, whether it is positive or negative. Mass tourism is a form of tourism that dominated the industry previously and its development showed a lack of consideration with regards to the limitations of natural resources, impact on wildlife, threat to the various cultural identities, and neglect of the environment, social development and participation of local communities in decision making for natural conservation (Risteski, Kocevski & Arnaudov, 2012). Therefore, responsible tourism emerged as an approach to tourism management, and emphasises the responsibility of role players in the tourism sector and destinations in general, to take action to achieve sustainable tourism development (Tourism Department of the City of Cape Town, 2009).

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Developing a tourism industry has both benefits and costs. However, if these impacts are understood from the views of tourism stakeholders, strengths and opportunities can be maximised while weaknesses and threats can be minimised. According to United Nations (2003), each destination will be different in terms of tourism characteristics. Thus each destination may have a particular list of indicators to evaluate the sustainability level in order to achieve the three principle outcomes of sustainable tourism development: economic growth, environmental integrity and social justice. The principles of sustainable tourism can be used as a guideline to design a specific list of indicators to evaluate the level of sustainability (Jaini, Anuar & Daim, 2012).

The Cape Town Declaration has recognised that participation from government, businesses and local communities only aids to create better places for hosts and guests; whereas to achieve sustainable tourism development is reliant on all stakeholders playing different but interdependent responsibilities (Tourism Department of the City of Cape Town, 2002). The tour operators' roles and responsibilities are significant in the practice of responsible tourism in tourism destination. This is because the tourism destination is the main element in the tour package sold by operators to tourists. If tour operators do not carry out their responsibility at the tourism destination, they could experience a loss in business due to the low quality of the said destination. Tour operator acts as a middleman between tourism suppliers and tourists in the tourism industry, and therefore their perspective in developing a list of responsible indicators are significant for evaluating the sustainability level of a tourist destination.

The study site of this study is Kinabalu National Park which is located in the state of Sabah on Borneo Island. Kinabalu National Park was gazetted as the first state park in Sabah in 1964 and declared Malaysia's first World Natural Heritage Site by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee after meeting selection criteria ii and iv in the year 2000 (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization World Heritage Centre, 2013). The park is located at the northern tip of the Crocker Range, which forms the backbone of mainland Sabah. The Kinabalu Park has four substations, namely Sayap in Kota Belud District, Nalapak and Serinsim in the Kota Marudu District, and Monggis in the Ranau District. The Serinsim and Monggis sub-stations are being developed as eco-tourism destinations (Sabah Parks, 2013). Mount Kinabalu is the most famous feature of the park which soars up to a height of 4,095.2m (Goh & Yusoff, 2010). Goh and Yusoff (2010) noted that many responsible tourism practices have been implemented in Kinabalu Park, but the effectiveness of such practices are unknown. This is because there are no specific indicators to evaluate the impacts after their implementation. In view of the foregoing, this paper aims to explore responsible tourism indicators of Kinabalu Park from the tour operators' perspectives.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Responsible tourism

Responsible tourism is an approach to the tourism management that aims to maximise economic, social and environmental benefits and minimise negative impacts to a destination. Responsible tourism is simply defined by the Tourism Department of the City of Cape Town (2009, p. 4) as "tourism that creates better places for people to live in, and better places to visit". This implies that the responsible tourism emphasises the benefits to local community and also the tourists, in terms of the economic, environmental, and social and cultural elements of sustainable tourism. The extended definition of responsible tourism is given by Department of Environmental Affair and Tourism (2002, p. 1), is: "responsible tourism is about enabling local communities to enjoy a better quality of life, through increased socio-economic benefits and an improved environment. It is also about providing better holiday experiences for guests and good business opportunities for tourism enterprises".

There are seven characteristics of responsible tourism recognised by the Cape Town Declaration (2002), which are: minimises negative economic, environmental and social impacts; generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry; involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances; makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity; provides access for physically challenged people; provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues; and culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts and builds local pride and confidence.

According to the Tourism Department of the City of Cape Town (2002), different destinations and stakeholders will have different priorities, and local policies and guidelines that need to be developed through multi-stakeholder processes, to develop responsible tourism in destinations. Evidently, more and more tourist destinations and tourism operations are acknowledging and recognising "responsible tourism" as a pathway towards sustainable tourism (United Nations Environment Programme, 2005). Responsible tourism is about taking responsibility for achieving sustainable development through tourism, and it is emerging from sustainable tourism (Goodwin, 2012). World Tourism Organization (2004) defined the sustainable development of tourism as a continuous process which requires informed participation of all stakeholders, strong political leadership and also a high level of tourist satisfaction. Thus, responsible tourism is part of achieving sustainable tourism.

2.2. Responsible tourism indicators

The process of defining indicators is an effective means of attracting attention to key questions and procuring information on the status and conditions of the types of capital for tourism operators (Tanguay, Rajaonson, and Therrien, 2011). Indicators are measures of the existence or severity of current issues, signals of upcoming problems, measures of risk and potential need for action and also the impacts of actions; it is also defined as information set which is formally selected to be used on a regular basis to measure changes of important elements for tourism development and management (World Tourism Organization, 2004). Indicators are also defined with respect to the local scale of application, which is significant since more detailed information could be considered with a greater level of locality, while aggregations are frequently used on a broader scale of application (Farsari and Prastacos, 2001). This means that different indicators are meaningful at different scales depend on whether the level is local or national.

Principles of sustainable tourism development have been described in many different ways since 1987 (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The key principles of sustainable tourism development are widely discussed in the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: *Our Common Future* (1987). In general, the main elements of sustainable tourism development are inter-generational equity, social justice and poverty alleviation, public commitment and environmental protection together with economic development, dealing cautiously with risk and uncertainty (McKercher, 2003). The sustainable tourism criterion takes into account both the preservation of the tourist destination and the capacity to satisfy tourists (Chan, 2010). Sustainable tourism development which focuses on tourism as a whole, however, is hard to apply in a particular destination because of different requirement needed (Risteski et al., 2012). Therefore the principles of sustainable tourism can be a guideline to design a specific list of indicators to evaluate the level of sustainability (Jaini et al., 2012).

Sustainable tourism indicators equate sustainability indicators, which are about integrating tourism into its environmental and social-cultural context (Farsari and Prastacos, 2001). Farsari and Prastacos (2001) also indicated that sustainability indicators for an existing tourist destination should be formulated to point out weaknesses where action must be taken and must examine the sector's relationship to the rest of the activities and the environment in an effort to achieve overall sustainability for the area. Good indicators are helpful tools for a better decision-making process to decrease the risks or costs of planning mistakes through identifying pros and cons, identification of emerging issues for prevention before deterioration, being aware of the impacts thus allowing corrective action if needed, and measuring and evaluating the performance of implemented plans and management activities in the sustainable tourism development. It also provides credible information to tourism stakeholders in order to foster accountability, and a monitoring system can be created to lead to continuous improvement with building solutions into management (World Tourism Organization, 2004).

There are eleven indicators proposed by World Tourism Organization and used by Jaini et al. (2012) to investigate the standard of the current ecotourism practice among ecotourism providers (travel agencies) in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Table 2.5). On the other hand, Bagul and Eranza (2010) also outlined the 21 success indicators for ecotourism site in Sabah (Table 2.5). A study done by Ramachandran (2009) determined the underlying meaning of responsible tourism indicators from various stakeholders' perspective at Taman Negara (National Park) in Pahang, Kelantan and Terengganu, Malaysia. Five emergent themes include socio-culture,

economy, ecology, technology and politics. The study's respondents were derived from four board categories of respondent groups namely, the local community, domestic tourists, international tourists and decision makers (Ramachandran, 2009).

The DG Enterprise and Industry (2013) also designed a European Tourism Indicator System as locally owned and led process for monitoring, managing, and enhancing the sustainability of a tourism destination. The system is drawn up as an instrument that any tourist destination in Europe can pick up and apply without specific training; it can be a useful method to track destination performance and make better management decisions, as well as affect adequate policies (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013). European Tourism Indicator System Toolkit was provided by DG Enterprise and Industry (2013) to help stakeholders measure and improve local destination's sustainable development; it is served as a guidelines for local 'champion' or local destination co-ordinator to implement the system in a destination. The system has a structure of 22 criteria of indicators, which are shown in Table 2.5.

An evaluation and monitoring system is needed to ensure the successful implementation of responsible tourism development in practice. The responsibility held by tour operator is significant and sophisticated, and a list of indicators needed to be designed for evaluation purposes (World Tourism Organization, 2004). Universal tourism indicators have been proposed by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) to appraise the practice of sustainable tourism. The eleven indicators projected by WTO clearly comprised the three important elements of sustainable tourism which include social, economic and environmental and management planning (Jaini et al., 2012) (seen in Table 2.5). However, from the list of indicators shown in Table 2.5; it has not been ascertained which indicators can be used in evaluating the sustainability of Kinabalu Park. Hence, the study attempts to explore the responsible indicators for Kinabalu National Park from the tour operators' perspective.

3. Research Approach

This is an exploratory research on tour operators' perspectives on responsible tourism indicators of Kinabalu Park. The study aims to understand the governing pattern of tour operators, to probe into the depth of the respondents' thoughts, and to extract the data that is grounded in the field. Social constructivism-interpretivism is used as an interpretive framework for this research due to its objective to explore human behaviour in relation to their perspectives on responsible tourism indicators in Kinabalu National Park. An inductive approach is adopted to gaining tour operator perspectives as opposed to the deductive approach which focuses on the breadth of the knowledge.

The qualitative method is used to collect data through 25 in-depth interviews with tour operators in Sabah who operated tours at the Kinabalu National Park. The purposeful sampling strategy is used to describe a subgroup in-depth. Open-ended questions are used during interviews because open-ended responses permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents. A topic guide was used during the interviews in order to achieve the aims of this research, and included the four principles of sustainable tourism which were: ecological, economic, social and cultural, and destination management. The said guide aimed to facilitate the direction of the interview especially when the interviewer was at a loss for words. It was also used in a flexible way to accommodate the nature of the interviewee as well as the environment where the interview was carried out. The time spent for one interview was around 30 minutes to one hour.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) with CREATIVE steps is used for data analysis. The data were analysed by transcribing the audio-recorded interviews verbatim into typed text. The eight CREATIVE steps consisted of: (1) Consider the study's research questions and purpose statement; (2) Read through the transcripts to gain a holistic sense of the data; (3) Examine the data for information related to the research questions; (4) Assign labels to those units of information that capture the motivation and challenges faced by the tour operator; (5) Thematised the data; (6) Interpret the emergent themes as respondents relate to the study's research questions and purpose statement; (7) Verify the trustworthiness of the findings by examination of previous research to frame findings (Shenton, 2004); and (8) Engage in the writing process to describe the findings (Pitney & Parker, 2009: p. 54).

Table 1. Core Indicators of Responsible Tourism.

Authors	Core indicators	Indicator grouping
Jaini et al. (2012)	1. Site Protection	Ecological
	2. Stress	
	3. Use Intensity	
	4. Waste Management	
	5. Critical Ecosystem	
	6. Social Impact	Social
	7. Local Satisfaction	Economic
	8. Consumer Satisfaction	
	9. Tourism Contribution to Local Economy	
	10. Planning Process	Planning
	11. Development Control	
Bagul and Eranza (2010)	1. Visible local community participation/high level of participation	
	2. High number of tourists	
	3. Well managed site	
	4. Clear improvement in live and livelihood	
	5. Improvement to infrastructures	
	6. Meeting objectives	
	7. Good cooperation among stakeholders	
	8. Practice good ecotourism management/ sustainable in every way	
	9. Promote conservation of natural resources	
	10. Preservation of culture	
	11. Number of ecotourism establishment	
	12. Happy and motivated community	
	13. Benefits to community	
	14. Being informative and educational	
	15. Satisfied tourists	
	16. Link to other good tourism site	
	17. Good high quality ecotourism products	
	18. High reputation	
	19. Properly developed site	
	20. Ability to draw interest with a 'wow' factors	
	21. Ability to capitalise strengths	
DG Enterprise and Industry (2013)	1. Sustainable tourism public policy	Destination Management
	2. Sustainable tourism management in tourism enterprise	
	3. Customer satisfaction	
	4. Information and communication	
	5. Tourism flow (volume and value) at destination	Economic Value
	6. Tourism enterprise(s) performance	
	7. Quantity and quality of employment	
	8. Safety and health	
	9. Tourism supply chain	
	10. Community/ social impact	Social and Cultural Impact
	11. Gender equality	
	12. Equality/ accessibility	
	13. Protecting and enhancing cultural heritage, local identity and assets	Environmental Impact
	14. Reducing transport impact	
	15. Climate change	
	16. Solid waste management	
	17. Sewage treatment	
	18. Water management	
	19. Energy usage	
	20. Landscape and biodiversity protection	
	21. Light and noise management	
	22. Bathing water quality	

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are derived from 25 tour operators who operating tours in Kinabalu Park. Four themes of indicators and 17 emergent core indicators are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Responsible Tourism Indicators in Kinabalu Park.

Theme of indicator	Emergent Core Indicators	Informant Responses
Destination Management (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	- Sustainable tourism public policy (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	Rules and regulation enforcement (Interview informants 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 17)
	- High participation (Bagul and Eranza, 2010)	High participation from tourism stakeholders (Interview informants 1, 2, 7, and 22), Especially, government (Interview informants 6, 10, 14, and 17); Tour operator (Interview informants 13 and 21)
	- Customer satisfaction (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013; Bagul and Eranza, 2010; Jaini et al., 2012)	High level of tourists' satisfaction (Interview informants 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14, 17, 18, and 19)
	- Information and communication (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	High level of awareness among tourism stakeholders (Interview informants 1, 2, 5, 6, 10, 13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 22, and 25)
	- Properly developed site (Bagul and Eranza, 2010; Jaini et al., 2012)	Well planned process (Interview informants 6, 7, 10, 11, and 23)
Economic Value (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	- Tourism contribution to local economy (Jaini et al., 2012)	Increase the income of local residents (Interview informants 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 20, 22, 23, and 25)
	- Quantity of employment (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	A large number of jobs created by tourism (Interview informants 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, and 23)
	- Quality of employment (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	The budget allocated for staff training (Interview informants 2, 11, 7, 19, and 20)
	- Tourism supply chain management (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	A high number of tour operators / enterprises to source locally (Interview informants 1, 7, 8, 9, 12, 17, and 22)
Ecological (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	- Stress (Jaini et al., 2012)	Control the number of climbers and visitor in KNP (Interview informants 1, 2, 7, 12, and 25)
	- Reducing transport impact (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	Use of green transportation (Interview informants 14, 17, 19, and 21)
	- Landscape and biodiversity management (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	Development control (Interview informants 11, 13, 14, 22, and 24); Critical ecosystem (Interview informants 2, 8, 11, 18, and 20)
	- Conservation (Bagul and Eranza, 2010)	The budget allocated for conservation in KNP (Interview informants 4, 9, 12, and 23)
	- Waste management (Jaini et al., 2012; DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	Rubbish allocation (Interview informants 22 and 24); 3R - recycle, reduce, reuse (Interview informants 4, 7, 8, 11, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21); Sewage treatment (Interview informant 17 and 21)
Social and cultural (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	- Satisfied residents (Bagul and Eranza, 2010)	High level of satisfaction by local community (Interview informants 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, and 25)
	- Improvement of infrastructure (Bagul and Eranza, 2010)	Improve the infrastructure in KNP (Interview informants 6, 10, 15, 16, 20, 21, and 22)
	- Protecting and enhancing cultural heritage, local identity and assets (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013)	Preservation of culture (Interview informants 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, and 25)

The first indicator is sustainable tourism public policy. Most of the informants suggested this indicator was a fundamental first step towards sustainability. The policy must be publicly available and externally communicated (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013). Interview informant 1 stated that *“It has policies initiated by the government – it should be ensured that everybody obeys the rules and regulations.”*

The second indicator refers to high participation from tourism stakeholders. Every stakeholder has a responsibility to be played within the tourism industry, thus a good relationship between stakeholders is significant to achieve responsible tourism. Otherwise, conflicts among stakeholders can cause problems to the industry (Bagul and Eranza, 2010). This can be evidenced in the following quote:

“What my boss always say, Kinabalu Park is a very good product, it is only world heritage in Sabah, so we have to sustain it, at the same time the only way to sustain is everybody work together no necessary covering everything, (it) can be a small part because we want to sustain; it is not for the profit.” (Interview informant 22)

The third indicator is customer satisfaction. Responsible tourism practices must meet the expectations of tourists or visitors, which include the availability of a pristine environment to be experienced along with cultural activities with the local community (Bagul and Eranza, 2010). According to DG Enterprise and Industry (2013), satisfied tourists will return, multiply their economic value, and generate jobs. This can be supported in the following response:

“...so, green tourism not only focuses on nature, but also the needs of tourists. If no tourists means only green not called as tourism.” (Interview informant 14)

The fourth indicator is information and communication to create awareness of responsible tourism practices in Kinabalu Park. The tour businesses should communicate their sustainability efforts to visitors through their products, marketing, or branding, in order to increase the sustainability level of a destination (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013). This can be referred in the following quote: *“Awareness is very important as a signal. Nowadays, people still use plastic bags because there is not enough awareness about the environmental implications.”* (Interview informant 14)

The fifth indicator refers to a properly developed site. The respondents have emphasised the need for a planning process and development control around Kinabalu Park to avoid the loss of natural resources. Surprisingly, informants indicated that Sabah Parks does not involve them in the planning process for Kinabalu Park. On the other hand, Sabah Parks is only able to control the development inside the Kinabalu Park but not the entire area of Kundasang, Sabah. As a result, Sabah Parks is unable to protect endangered fauna from encroachment. This is mentioned by interview informant 11. This indicator was also noted by Bagul and Eranza (2010), in that a properly developed site ensures that the goals and objectives of the site are achieved in due course.

The next indicator is tourism contribution to the local economy. Based on the responses from tour operators, the economic indicator was important as economic development was the main reason for the existence of tourism and also business. Financial reward is the goal of tour operators when running their business and also that of local authorities when conserving a heritage site. Income is obtained from tourists through entry fee charges and expended for site protection, which then contributes towards satisfying tourists' expectations (Goh and Yusoff, 2010).

In addition to direct economic benefits from visitor spending, job creation is the most attractive characteristic of tourism for most government (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013). The seventh indicator is quantity of employment. A increasing of job opportunity is the most attractive characteristic of responsible tourism in Kinabalu Park. This can be referred in the following quote:

“Tourism creates jobs to the local community; in the past they engaged in cultivation but now they are selling handicraft and vegetation to tourists in the market...” (Interview informant 2)

The eighth indicator is quality of employment. This indicator was highlighted by DG Enterprise and Industry (2013). Local workers are the ones dealing with the tourists; the higher the quality of employment, the higher the satisfaction level of tourists. Some of the interview informants (2, 7, 11, 19, and 20) have stated that they have joined the seminar or training courses that organised by their own company, Sabah Tourist Association and Government. These courses comprise how to serve the tourists, ecotourism introduction and so on.

According to DG Enterprise and Industry (2013), connecting tourism businesses with local producers and suppliers of tourism-related goods and services helps develop the economy around Kinabalu Park. The ninth indicator is tourism supply chain management. This is observed in the following response:

“Tour Company sources a lot of things from the local people like lunch, tour guides, porters, and so on.” (Interview informant 1)

The tenth indicator is stress on the park. Sabah Parks has limited the numbers of climbers to Mount Kinabalu but there is no limitation as to the number of visitors to the Kinabalu Park itself, especially the Botanical Garden which is located inside the park. The higher number of visitors to the Park, the higher the possibility of destruction occurring. This statement is supported by interview informant 1 as: *“Quality has to be considered over quantity. A cheap package does not indicate that quality is taking place. More people visiting the park will destroy the environment.”* This indicator is adopted by Jaini et al. (2012).

The eleventh indicator refers to the reduction of the transportation impact, which is suggested by DG Enterprise and Industry (2013). There are several respondents who maintained an emphasis on green transportation, also called environmentally-friendly vehicles. Transportation to and around the Kinabalu Park contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and local air pollution. This is evidence in the following response:

"...the journey to go to the Kinabalu National Park is also needed take into consideration to avoid air pollution..." (Interview informant 17)

The twelfth indicator refers to a landscape and biodiversity protection. Kinabalu National Park is popular with its abundance of biodiversity; high biodiversity helps ensure the sustainability of natural areas benefits the park's image and is attractive to tourists (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013). However, interview informant 11 disclosed that:

"they (Sabah Parks) didn't enforce the rules and regulations such as penalties on those going against the rules. For example local people are still hunting birds and other animals around the KNP. Like the numbers of birds are decreasing; if you go to KNP you can only see around 20 species of birds, if you are lucky maybe around 30 types of birds." This indicator highlights the importance of investing in landscape and biodiversity protection and the tourism sector's role in supporting this process (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013).

The thirteenth indicator is the conservation of the environment. Natural resources are the main attraction in Kinabalu Park; therefore conservation is essential for environmental reasons and to sustain the park (Bagul and Eranza, 2010). This can be extracted in the following quote:

"Conservation is important because if we don't protect Kinabalu National Park, in the end we have nothing to sell to our clients." (Interview informant 18)

The fourteenth indicator is waste management. Tourism activities, such as climbing, are a main contributor to waste and sewage in Kinabalu Park. Waste reduction can and should be addressed at a destination and DG Enterprise and Industry (2013) has suggested several reduction initiatives, which include economic incentives, recycling, composting and reuse programmes. Effluents cause severe environmental and health problems and create a negative image of the destination if not properly treated (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013). This can be found from the following response:

"...you can see few years ago, the climbers can direct drink the water from the mountain but now you cannot drink anymore, because a lot of climbers go up and stay there... for three days two nights or two days one night... they eat there they excrete there..." (Interview informant 17)

The fifteenth indicator is satisfied residents. Resident satisfaction is a key indicator of the social impact of tourism on a community. According to DG Enterprise and Industry (2013), the changes in satisfaction level need to be constantly tracked and compared to levels of tourist flow, because this can identify problems in advance so that they can be addressed and planning decisions can be directly influenced. The respondents (7, 9, 13, 14, and 17) noted that tourism brings more positive than negative impacts to local residents through the creation of job opportunities such as mountain guides and porters, as well as business opportunities like selling fruits, and handicraft; residents also learn new things from the tourists. There is a clear improvement in the lives and livelihoods of local residents who stay around the park.

The sixteenth indicator is improvement of infrastructure. Infrastructure was one of the success indicator found by Bagul and Eranza (2010). The interview informants also mentioned that infrastructure in the Kinabalu Park has been improved for tourism and indirectly benefits the local community. However, some informants have a different opinion for this statement. This can be evidenced in the following quote:

"They have school there but are less, education should come first and you can see if the school can't carry all the children, the parent forced to bring their children down to the city to get the proper schooling. They are away from their family so it is also an issue. Once they live in city they are more likely to stay in city rather than in upstairs." (Interview informant 22)

The last indicator is protecting and enhancing cultural heritage, local identity and assets. The respondents also expressed that some traditional culture still existed but some were lost due to modernisation, although the impact to tourism was negligible. This can be proven by following quotes:

"...local cultural is one of the attractions of the Kinabalu Park; tourists like to see their culture." (Interview informant 12)

"You can see the older generation is still practicing but the young generation is no. this is because what they see from the tourists and also internet. This is internal or quiet influence." (Interview informant 22)

"...for example, like Kadazan, know how to dance the Sumazau, so to accommodate more tourists coming in, some of the tourists may interest to learn the dances so the dance ... they have to accommodate the tourists they may simplify their dances. That is no original of the dance. In the future it may loss of the traditional dance." (Interview informant 25)

According to DG Enterprise and Industry (2013), a set of policies to protect the tangible (Kinabalu Park) and intangible (other expressions, cultural heritage that is sense of place and resident pride) local identities is needed to be formed by local authority in a destination.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper presents the tour operators' perspectives on responsible tourism indicators in Kinabalu National Park. The findings shows 4 themes of indicators and 17 core indicators, which include destination management (sustainable tourism public policy; high participation; customer satisfaction; information and communication; properly developed site), economic value (tourism contribution to local economy; quantity of employment; quality of employment; tourism supply chain management), ecological (stress; reducing transportation impact; landscape and biodiversity management; conservation; waste management), and social (satisfied residents; improvement of infrastructure) and cultural (protecting and enhancing cultural heritage, local identity and assets).

The findings can be used by Sabah Parks to design an effective monitoring system for Kinabalu Park, in order to sustain or maintain the park for the long term, as opposed to a rapid, short-term development, by taking tour operators' perspectives into consideration. Government authorities can also refer to this research to note the responsible tourism indicators of Kinabalu Park, from the tour operators' perspectives, in terms of ecological, economic, social and cultural aspects. However, this study is solely focused on local tour operators in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah and hence sample is limited. The tourism industry involves a wide range of stakeholders, such as government, tourists and other small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and the roles of each group is very significant in the development of responsible tourism indicators for Kinabalu Park. Therefore, future research should investigate the opinions of the other stakeholders when finalising the responsible tourism indicators of Kinabalu Park.

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