

3rd World Conference on Learning, Teaching and Educational Leadership – WCLTA 2012

Developing Human Capital for Rural Community Tourism: Using Experiential Learning Approach

Abdul Rasid Abdul Razzaq^{a*}, Nor Haniza Mohamad^b, Syed Shikh Syed A.Kader^c
Mohamad Zaid Mustafad^d, Mohd Yusop Ab.Hadi (Dr),^e Amran Hamzah(Dr),^f Zainab
Khalifah(Dr)^g

^{a*,d,e} Faculty of Technical Education, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn, Malaysia (UTHM) Johor, Malaysia

^{b,e} Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan, Johor Bahru

^{f,g} Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)

Abstract

Community awareness, lack of tourism knowledge and skills are the basic constraints that limit the ability of the local people to actively participate in the tourism planning and development. In Malaysia, Miso Walai Homestay at Kinabatangan, Sabah was recognized as one of the best Community Based Tourism Model not only at national level but at the international level. Thus, this study was to explore the process of community capacity building particularly on the aspect of awareness, knowledge, skills as well as attitude of the rural community that enable them to involve themselves in tourism planning. This study applies a qualitative approach by conducting in-depth interview with key informants. All the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results of the study showed that about 3 years has been used by the NGO together with the pioneer MESCOT members for the capacity building particularly on the human capital development. The knowledge, skills as well as awareness of the local people have been developed through experiential learning approach.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Ferhan Odabaşı

Keywords: Human Capital Development, Rural Community Tourism, Experiential Learning Approach;

1. Introduction

Community Based Tourism (CBT) is an alternative form of tourism that was developed based on the negotiation and participation of key stakeholders in the destination (Saarinen, 2006). Several other authors viewed CBT as tourism that was owned and managed by the community. CBT is a form of tourism 'where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remains within the community'. It is a form of rural tourism that has increasingly been accepted in most of developing countries as a strategy towards poverty reduction. Human resource development is an essential component that needs to be addressed in the early stage of development. The most important human resources development challenge in rural tourism seem to be equipping local communities with the required knowledge, skills

*Corresponding Author: Abdul Rasid Abdul Razzaq, Tel +060197723536
rasid@uthm.edu.my

and awareness to enable them to meaningfully participate in the tourism development. As stated by Moscardo (2008) lack of knowledge is the main barrier of the community to effectively participate in the rural tourism development. There is still lack of research conducted particularly in the tourism area on the process of human capital development for rural tourism purposes. Thus, the main purpose of this paper is to explore how the knowledge, skill, awareness as well as experiences of the rural community in the District of Batu Puteh, Kinabatangan Sabah have been developed for tourism.

2. Human Resource Development for Community Based Tourism

CBT has been recognized as a catalyst for social economic development (Hall and Jenkins, 1998). It has also been used as a strategy for the development of countries worldwide (Davis & Morais, 2004; McCool, Moisey & Nickerson, 2001) particularly in the developing countries. The concept of CBT has emerged in response to the negative impact of mass tourism that took place during the early stages of tourism development; particularly towards local people (Murphy, 1985). Due to the potential of CBT towards community development, many rural communities have turned to tourism as a way of diversifying their economy activities (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Mair, 2006). Even though most tourism scholars have theoretically agreed upon the potential and roles of CBT towards community development, not many governments or NGO driven projects have succeeded in reality (Goodwin and Santilli, 2009, Moscardo, 2008). Goodwin and Santilli (2009) revealed that the large majority of CBT projects enjoy very little success, and the most likely outcome for a CBT initiative is its collapse, after funding dries up (Mitchell and Muskoy, 2008). In many other situations, benefits have been slow to emerge. They are modest at best and usually limited to a specific group within the community (Moscardo, 2008). The main challenges that hinder the rural community to actively participate and benefit from the tourism development are due to the human resources development. Most of the rural people have less learning opportunities and exposure compared to those who are living in the urban area. Thus, of course they have limited knowledge, skills and resources to involve in the tourism development and management. Whereas the local people involvement has commonly accepted as a pre-requisite not only to localize tourism benefits but also limit some of the socio-economic problems. Human Resource Development (HRD) is the framework for helping employees develops their personal and organizational skills, knowledge, and abilities. Learning opportunities is an essential component towards human resource development. Learning is the process by which skills, knowledge and attributes are acquired and translated into habitual forms of behaviour and performance, whether by design or through the natural passage of time. C.Rogers distinguished two types of learning: cognitive (meaningless) and experiential (significant). The key to the distinction is that experiential learning deals with the needs and wants of the learner. Rogers lists these qualities of experiential learning: personal involvement, self initiated, evaluated by learner, and pervasive effects on learning. This approach emphasized on the learner's real experience as a main component in the learning process. David A. Kolb (1975) has developed a model of learning based on experience known as the Kolb's Learning Cycle. IN this model there are four vital components in the learning process which are Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Active Experimentation. This means that someone who learns something new based on his or her own experiences will form a new concept which will be used in the real situation.

3. Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative study using the case study approach in order to understand in-depth the development of awareness, knowledge and skills of community members in the development of community tourism in Batu Puteh, Kinabatangan Sabah. The Miso Walai Homestay in Batu Puteh is chosen as a case study because the community tourism development in that area is a local community initiative that received various awards in Malaysia as well as international accolades as a model of sustainable tourism development. Data was collected by semi-structured interview conducted amongst 14 key informants which consists of Pioneer MESCOT members who were involved in the tourism development from the beginning. This is because interview is an important source of information in a qualitative study (Yin, 2003). This method provides a way of generating data by asking people to talk about or share their views or experiences (Lebar, 2007, Yin, 2003) The transcripts of the interview were analyzed by using thematic analysis.

4. Result and Discussion

This study shows that the approach used by the NGO which is World Wild Life (WWF) in the early stages of community tourism planning development in Batu Puteh is more towards community capacity building. For three years starting from 1997 till 2000 the process of building community awareness, knowledge, skills and exposure towards tourism activities were the main focus of the NGO. The development of human capacity has to be done before a project can be launched (Simptson et.al, 2002). Community readiness is a factor that will determine their active involvement in the tourism development.

4.1 *Awareness, Knowledge and Community Experience Building*

The process of inculcating awareness, knowledge and community experience were the main focus in the early stages of the development of community tourism in Batu Puteh. For three years from 1997 till 2000, the process of enabling the community especially in terms of awareness, knowledge building and community skills for the purpose of tourism development planning is the main agenda of World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Hall (2005) highlighted the lack of awareness and understanding as the cause of tourism development in which community members are not ready with the changes and failed to capitalize on the opportunities arising from the development. Conversely, a lack of knowledge among a handful of village communities contribute to the formation of their negative perception of the project at an early stage. Awareness, knowledge and community skills were built through informal learning using the experiential learning approach. The community were directly involved in the tourism development planning and the experiences that they go through is a meaningful learning process. Hence, till today the community tourism development in Batu Puteh is fully managed by the local community through the establishment of the Tourism Cooperative or better known as 'KOPEL'. The involvement of the community in the learning process is through the activities below:

4.1.1 *Research activities*

Research activities was an early exposure of the community to the learning process especially in building initial knowledge about the natural resources in that area as well as the tourism needs. The MESCOT members at that time were divided into three groups to do a research into the three important components of the tourism planning needs. Three main studies that were done at that time were the study of forestry to see the resources in the forest including the species of trees and wildlife in it. This goes for the uses of the trees in the jungle for medicinal purposes and so on. All the information were recorded and kept in a file. Meanwhile, another group studied the culture of the Sungai People, and moved within the village to collect information about culture, beliefs, traditional games, food and all related aspects. All the data are collected and recorded. Another group did a research on the 'business world' whereby this group went to the small town in Sandakan to do a market research, to get the quotations on the related items for tourism activities, to find the informatin on credit facilities from the banks. This group went to hotels, tourism agencies to obtain samples of tourism packages. Through research activities such as these, the members of MESCOT were able to build awareness, knowledge and skills through their own experience to be used in doing the planning for their own area.

4.1.2 *Exposure Trip*

The learning process for the community happened through the exposure trip organized by the members of MESCOT. Many trips and visits were scheduled in the initial stages including a visit to the community involved with the homestay programme in Sandakan and Kota Kinabalu. Through this exposure visit, the MESCOT members were better able to understand about the programme, including the management and operation aspects. Besides that, the experience of being a homestay participant enables them to understand the needs and the dislikes of a tourist. This experience makes them more knowledgeable and confident to handle a homestay programme. Exposure visits were also conducted to tourism destinations in Sabah like Kinabalu National Park and so on to provide real exposure

to the environment of tourism. They also managed to gain experience by participating in tourism packages conducted by tourism agencies including by staying in hotels around Sabah. This is an informal learning process that is effective for the MESCOT members. This kind of exposures are important for rural communities because they do not have experience as a tourist and they are not aware of the needs of tourists (Pearce, 1996).

4.1.3 Outdoor Activities

Apart from that, this study also found that the knowledge, skills and attitudes was developed through sports and recreational activities and team building programs organized by MESCOT. Through this program, team spirit and self-esteem can be improved and there are various skills and knowledge acquired indirectly through the activity. For example, mountain climbing at Kinabalu by MESCOT members which not only can build their knowledge, but is related to recreation and physical endurance but also can plan and make preparation before the activity is implemented. Kayaking through the club sports, leisure activities, that is held on a weekly basis among the members of the village also can reveal the knowledge and skills of communities to conduct these activities as well as strengthen community relations.

4.1.4 Brainstorming and Discussion Activities

The learning process amongst the MESCOT members happens through their involvement in the brainstorming and discussion activities for the purpose of tourism development planning. Each activity that was done was discussed in the MESCOT group to enable every member to obtain the information. Before each programme was done, the MESCOT members will sit together for a discussion and planning. As an example, before a visit, MESCOT members will do an in-depth planning together about the activities of the visit. All the members are educated and taught to take part in the discussion. Decisions made are mutual decisions. Upon completion of each activity, members need to present what they have learnt from the activity. Through the group activities, many things were learnt by the members such as communication skills, self-confidence, respecting the views of members as well as teamwork.

5. Leadership Exposure Among MESCOT Members

This study also shows that the MESCOT members were exposed with leadership experience through the appointment of active MESCOT members as 'weekly leaders'. The selection criteria of these weekly leaders is based on the level of active involvement of the MESCOT members in the span of one week. The MESCOT members are evaluated based on a point system. Through this appointment, the MESCOT members will gain the experience of how to be a leader including doing weekly work planning, delegating tasks to members, doing supervision, reports as well as charigin meetings. This is one form of learning through the experiences of the MESCOT members.

6. Skill Building based on Training Module

The skills of the MESCOT members are built based on the needs at the particular span of time. There are 14 courses offered at initial stage. Any MESCOT members who successfully complete the course will receive a 'badge'. The process of coming up with the training modules also uses the approach of community involvement including coming up with the relevant badges. The learning approach in the modules is based on self-learning approach or self-directed learning, whereby the participants are tasked to participate in certain projects.

7. Conclusion

Experiential learning is a learning approach that is practical especially amongst the rural community that is limited in terms of academic ability. The building of knowledge and understanding of the community members about the tourism development process is more effective through their actual involvement in the process. The development of human resources was the main focus in the tourism development planning process in Miso Walai.

The understanding and knowledge of the MESCOT members enables the bottom up approach to be used in the tourism development planning.

Acknowledgements

Thanks and gratitude to Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) for the support given in making this study a success.

References

- Briedenhman, J., & Wickens, E. (2004). *Tourism Route as a Tool for the Economic Development of Rural Area-Vibrant Hope or Impossible Dream?*. *Tourism Management*, 71-79.
- Davis, J.S., & Morais, D. B. (2004). *Fraction and Enclaves: Small Towns and Socially Unsustainable Tourism Development*. *Journal of Travel Research*.
- Dollahite, S., Nelson, A., Frongillo, A., & Griffin, R. (2005). Building community capacity through enhanced collaboration in the farmers market nutrition program *Agriculture and Human Values*, 22, 339-354.
- [Goodwin, H., Santili, R. \(2009\). *Community-Based Tourism: a Success?, 2009*](#)
- Hall, C.M. and Jenkins, J.M (1998). *The Policy Dimension of Rural Tourism and Recreation*
- Hall, C.M. (2005). *Tourism: Rethinking the Social Science Mobility*. Pearson, Harlow, UK.
- Kolb, D. A. and Fry, R. (1975) 'Toward an applied theory of experiential learning;', in C. Cooper (ed.) *Theories of Group Process*, London: John Wiley.
- Lebar, O. (2007). *Penyelidikan Kualitatif: Pengenalan kepada teori dan Metod*, Penerbit UPSI, Tanjung Malim, Malaysia.
- Moscardo, G. (ed). (2008). *Building Community Capacity for Tourism Development*, CABI, Australia.
- Murphy, P.E. (1985). *Tourism : a community approach*, New York: Methuen
- McCool, S.F., Moisey, R.N., & Nickerson, N.P (2001). *What Should Tourism Sustain? The Disconnect with Industry Perceptions of Useful Indicators*. *Journal of Travel Research*, 40, 124-131
- Mair, H. (2006) *Global Restructuring and Local Responses: Investigating Rural Tourism Policy in Two Canadian Communities*. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 9 (1), 1-45.
- Pearce, P.L., Moscardo, G., & Ross, G.F. (1996). *Tourism community relationship*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Simpson, L., Wood, L. And Daws, L. (2003). *Community Capacity Building: Starting with People not Project*. *Community Development Journal*, 38. 277-286
- Saarinen, J. (2006). *Traditions of Sustainability in Tourism Studies*. *Annals of Tourism Research* 33, 1121-1140
- Timothy, D.J. (1999). *Participatory planning: a view of tourism in Indonesia*. *Annals of Tourism Research* 26, 371-391.
- Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (4th ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication