Tourism cooperative for scaling up community-based tourism

Nor Haniza Mohamad
Faculty of Management, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, Malaysia, and
Amran Hamzah
Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, Malaysia

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to share how a tourism cooperative creates economic sustainability as well as bringing socio-cultural and environmental benefits to its members.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors’ case study was the Miso Walai Homestay in Batu Puteh on the Kinabatangan River of Sabah, Malaysia. In-depth interviews were conducted with cooperative managers and cooperative members who were identified through the purposive sampling method. Direct observation was used to gain an understanding of ground reality.

Findings – A community cooperative effectively manages economic, socio-cultural, and environmental concerns of the local people. Society’s perception of entrepreneurship and mainstreaming has changed. Shareholdership enables higher community involvement in the decision-making processes, increases tourism income distribution, solidifies the sense of ownership, strengthens social cohesion and, inevitably, increases community support.

Practical implications – The lessons learned from the experience of the Model of Economically Sustainable Community Tourism (MESCOT) in using a community cooperative to run its community-based tourism (CBT), which eventually expanded its economic benefits, are relevant to researchers and practitioners, and can guide other local CBT organizations in Malaysia.

Originality/value – Although the case study referred to a specific community in Malaysia, the findings do prove that an effective model for community-based tourism is possible and has potential for replication in other places with similar enabling environments.

Keywords Community cooperative, Tourism cooperative, Community-based tourism, Miso Walai Homestay, KOPEL, MESCOT, Community-based tourism business model, Broad-based organizational structure, Communities, Co-operative organizations, Tourism

Paper type General review

1. Introduction
1.1 Community-based tourism issues and community cooperative
Community-based tourism (CBT) has been acknowledged as a catalyst for rural community development. However, delicate issues pertaining to the management and operations of CBT have curbed the development and growth of CBT. Much literature has extensively discussed different facets of the issues (Denman, 2001; Vignati and Laumans, 2010; Belsky, 1999; Scheyvens, 2007; Mitchell and Hall, 2005; Reed, 1997; Renard, 2001) which negate the potentials of CBT. Many of the CBT issues stem from internal problems such as weak business models that cannot support CBT activities. The economic fragility of CBT has prompted researchers to argue that, if CBT is to be profit-oriented, then it should be run as a business entity. This calls for a sophisticated

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