COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING: LESSONS FROM MISO WALAI HOMESTAY

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ABSTRACT

This paper emphasizes the importance of community capacity building towards sustaining community based tourism. The literature review reveals that the main constraint of sustainable community based tourism development particularly in the rural areas revolve around community capacity building. Lack of awareness and general knowledge about tourism are seen as the main factor that contributes to the failure of the community based tourism development. Community empowerment serves as a fundamental to enable active participation in tourism development at the community level. In addition, local leadership and organization are important components in community capacity building that play vital roles in the success of community based tourism. Limited community capacity will lead to external domination of local tourism development. As a result, local community gains only minimum benefits from tourism development. Therefore, building community capacity becomes critical in order to ensure the success of community based tourism. The concept of community capacity building is widely used for community development in the field of health, agriculture and education. However, limited literature discusses about the community capacity building in the field of tourism development. Thus, this paper will explore the concept of community capacity building in the context of tourism development; the evolution of community capacity building; and the dynamic process of community capacity building according to tourism development stages. The formulation of community capacity
building to cater the development and evolution of community based tourism becomes an interesting aspect to focus due to the dynamic nature of community capacity. The inability of a community to be involved in tourism development and react towards business environment changes will be detrimental to the growth of community based tourism programme. A community based tourism programme - Miso Walai Homestay located at Kinabatangan, Sabah, Malaysia is chosen to illustrate the contextual setting of the discussions and debates for community capacity building in this paper.

**Keywords:** community capacity building; sustainable community based tourism

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**INTRODUCTION**

Tourism has become one of the most important sources of employment that provides governments with substantial tax revenue. It generates various tourism jobs and business opportunities in developing countries, helps to equalize economic opportunities and keeps rural residents from moving to the overcrowded cities (UNWTO, 2007). Such statement highlights the important of tourism development as a strategy for rural community development. Many developing countries use tourism as a catalyst for socio-economic development especially in the rural areas (Hall and Jenkins, 1998). Tourism is therefore viewed as a community and economic development tools that serves certain ends (Forstner, 2004, UNWTO, 2007; Davis & Morais, 2004; McCool, Moisey & Nickerson, 2001). Many rural communities have turned to tourism as a way to diversify their economy activities (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Mair, 2006) in response to the global demand towards nature and community based tourism.

In mentioning the Community Based Tourism (CBT) approach, the community should be given the opportunity to participate and decide what kind of future living they want (Murphy, 1996). CBT is an alternative form of tourism that is totally managed and controlled by local community. This approach emphasizes the 'community' as the focal point. It is different from the traditional top-down tourism development as it emphasizes on local input and control over the type, scale, and intensity of tourism development. Similar to other community initiatives, CBT highlights the importance of community empowerment and 'ownership' in tourism development as a means to sustain the community growth (Simpson, 2002). It is also a process generated from the bottom up community approach to develop and manage tourism products or activities at the local level or to craft and implement a tourism strategy (Hall, 2000; Murphy, 1985). This alternative form of development is led by the community using community resources without the involvement of external private or public capital. It focuses more on fair distribution and withholding benefits within a local area compared to traditional forms of tourism development which is based on profit maximization (Blackstock, 2005; Hall, 2000).

The growth of community tourism perspectives is based on growing awareness of need for more resident-responsive tourism, which involves more participation of grass-roots members of a destination community in tourism decision making (Dann, 1999). As a consequence, the acceptance and involvement of the local people is crucial in order to determine the success of community based tourism development. Active participation of locals will enable them to manage and control the tourism development as well as gain maximum profit. Hence, the success of tourism development must be based on the local value, interest, needs and local setting (Gilled & Reed 1997). As mentioned by Murphy (1985), local participation in tourism planning and management is essential because whenever the development does not fit with local aspiration, value, needs and capabilities, then it will create tension and conflict among the local people towards the development.