

Participatory Community-based Agrotourism: A Case Study of Bangplakod Community, Nakhonnayok Province, Thailand

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Abstract

This research aimed to initiate participatory community-based agrotourism (CBAT) in Bangplakod Sub-district, Nakhonnayok Province, Thailand. Therefore, Participatory Action Research (PAR) process was applied. Observation, community fora, network building and workshops were used to enhance community participation. The research participants included diverse Bangplakod's stakeholders who were the key informants and practitioners in locality. During PAR process, Bangplakod CBAT plan and project were developed to empower local decision making in managing tourism. Qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis and verified by triangulation. The research results revealed the area was unique for being the largest ornamental tree plantation. Local people had cultivated skills and wanted to preserve their original way of life which suitable for agrotourism development. The community desired to transfer their agro knowledge as tourism activities to give tourist experiences. The CBAT group mutually operated 5 development projects included local guide training, agro learning based, agrotourism route, public relation and local lodge. The community initiated a trial trips to tourists and made the lessons learned after program finish. CBAT was not only empowered local to make decision in agrotourism but also vitalized economic, cultural and natural impacts.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism, Agrotourism, Participatory Development, Local Participation, Participatory Action Research

Introduction

The tourism industry plays a significant role in the economic system of Thailand. The government consistently uses its tourism policy to increase the country's prosperity by increasing international tourists' arrival numbers and expenditures and promoting domestic travel among the Thai people (The Cabinet, 2014) as tourism statistic represented that there were 35 million tourists in 2017 and gained 1.82 trillion-baht in tourism receipts (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018). Recently, the National Tourism Board has approved the "Amazing Thailand Tourism Year 2018" policy, which focuses on tourism as an industry that

includes stability, economy, society, psychology and foreign affairs. Through Thainess, this policy integrates all sectors to make Thailand a world-class tourist destination, which distributes income throughout the community (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2017a). Over the last two decades, there has been a steady stream of sustainable and alternative tourism. As a result, the demand has arisen for community-based tourism, or CBT. CBT is a form of tourism that seeks to empower communities to manage tourism growth and achieve community aspirations for well-being, including economic, social and environmental well-being (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2016).

Bangplakod sub-district is settled in Ongkharak district, Nakhonnayok Province, located in the Central region of Thailand nearby Bangkok only 80 kilometers. The place is the largest ornamental tree plantation and plant market in the country, with a total area of 358 acres, covered in 5 miles with 11 villages and 500 cultivator households (T-news, 2017) that presented local knowledge as garden tree specialist. The provincial administration has policy to develop and promote organic farm and other natural resources into tourism to increase resident quality of life as environmental friendly areas and residents' income booster (Nakhonnayok Governor's Office, 2018). As mention previously, Bangplakod community had potential to be agrotourism destination. Agrotourism is a form of rural tourism in which tourists see and participate in traditional agricultural practices without destroying the ecosystem (Zoto, Qirici, and Polena, 2013). Agrotourism is the "repositioning of the agricultural sector to maximize the integration of indigenous food, culture, wellness and the environment into a sustainable tourism experience", according to Waithe (2009). The key elements include farm-based tourism, community tourism, agro-heritage tourism, agro-trade (agribusiness), culinary tourism, and health and wellness tourism. It is recommended by many researchers (Murphy, 1988; Swaroop and Morenoff, 2006; Vincent and Thompson, 2002) that community participation in tourism is crucial for sustainable development. Unfortunately, Bangplakod residents rarely participated in tourism activities, they simply engaged in selling trees for tourist. The development of CBAT is important for Bangplakod people because it encourages local people to rely on their farming knowledge, farming resources and community participation to earn additional income through agrotourism. Several studies found that agrotourism development provide a number of benefits. McGeehee et al. (2002) discovered that small farms in Virginia had motivation to initiate agrotourism because they wanted to increase additional income and to utilize worthy resources. Gao, Barbieri, and Valdivia (2014) also suggested that farm enterprises were able to use wildlife, water resources, historic elements, and farm animals as a pull factor to attract tourists. Moreover, agrotourism also provides non-economic benefits such as acquiring new farm customers, educating agro knowledge, and raising farmers' quality of life (Tew and Barbieri, 2012). It also has ability to maintain sustainability of natural resources as well as revitalization of local wisdom and pride.

This study focuses on initiating a participatory community-based agrotourism to Bangplakod community. The result has extended knowledge of Bangplakod's community-based agrotourism management. It has empowered local people in tourism management decision making as well as encouraged usage of resources more efficiently.

Theoretical Framework

Community-based tourism

The need for sustainable tourism development and concentration on the local community development inspired various types of tourism which are highly compatible with the concept of sustainable tourism (e.g., ecotourism, cultural tourism, and small-scale rural 'agrotourism' which brings income to farmers) (Swarbrooke, 2011; Swarbrooke, 1999). CBT is an alternative tourism supported sustainable development required locals' or communities'

participation who are the real resources owners to use the existent valuables with carefully and prudently and return both of economic and non-economic advantages back to them (Lee and Jan, 2019; Breugel, 2013; Ruiz - Ballesteros, 2011; Brunt and Courtney, 1999; Goodwin and Santilli, 2009). Because CBT induces community development and it sustainability, it plays a major role to reduce poverty problem (Lee and Jan, 2019).

CBT concept is used flexibly. It can be defined as “tourism owned and/or manage by communities and intended to deliver wider community benefit, benefiting a wider group than those employed in the initiative” (Goodwin and Santilli, 2009). CBT tend to answer the question how can tourism contribute to the process of community development? than ‘how community benefit more from tourism?’ (Suansri, 2003). Although, CBT is very popular for Sustainable Tourism Development, it has been critically reviewed (Goodwin, 2011) how community member should participate in planning and developing with their limitations such as inadequate knowledge in tourism managing and marketing, fund seeking or disharmony, etc. (Breugel, 2013; Timothy, 1999).

Some researchers attempted to eliminate CBT managerial weakness to prepare the community for CBT following Pinel (1998) offered CBT planning process model included 4 phases of community assessment and organization development, planning and preparation, delivery, and monitoring and evaluation. Timothy and Tosun (2003) suggested that participation, cooperation or collaboration and incremental of local residents and related stakeholders are substantial for tourism destination planning. Moreover, the 10 steps process of facilitating CBT development with the community who is primary leader included choose a destination, complete a feasibility study in cooperation, set vision and objectives, develop a plan to prepare the community to manage tourism, set direction for organizational management, design tour programs, train interpretive guides, develop a marketing plan, launch a pilot tour program and monitor and evaluate the process (Suansri, 2003). Braun (2008) suggested Rio Esteban tourism development framework with 6 steps namely tourism potential assessment, secure assistance, develop an integrated approach, develop product, market community and on-going support. According to previous educators, there are commonly in community should prepare it potential and establish a commitment among stakeholders through setting mutual goals and complete participating.

The role of stakeholders' participation in agrotourism and community-based tourism

Understanding of all related stakeholders in agrotourism and CBT is crucial for operating accomplishment. Stakeholders refer to any organized group of people who shares common interests or systems (Grimble and Wellard, 1997) as stakeholder collaboration, all parties (local/internal stakeholders/ actors: local tourism management, and local communities and external stakeholders: public/government, profit and non-profit institutions) involved in the process should ensure that they will obtain the benefits of the collaboration process (Manaf, Purbasari, Damayanti et al., 2018). According to local conditions in developing country, Timothy (1999) offered a normative model of participatory tourism planning for CBT. The model involved local in decision making by setting tourism goals and desires and earned tourism benefit by participation and residents' tourism education. Furthermore, all stakeholders have to accept positive and negative advantages from tourism and realize their different roles and method of participation (i.e. community's role is owning and managing tourism by making decision and acting, tourism businesses utilize the community as a tourism destination by using community services and marketing CBT, Non-government organizations or NGO's facilitate CBT development by fostering stakeholders' cooperation whereas government organizations or GO's play as sponsors by providing technical and financial support) (Suansri, 2003).

In Thailand, there are various organizations supported farmers and communities initiating in CBT and agrotourism. The Department of Agricultural Extension (DOAE), Ministry of

Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC) acts as the main GO's who support CBT and agrotourism. Under DOAE administration, Agrotourism Promotion and Development Group (AGRODOAE) is the head information center of CBT and agrotourism knowledge for farmers and tourists. Whereas Provincial Agricultural Extension Office (PAEO), District Agricultural Extension Office (DAEO), and Sub-District Agricultural Extension Office (SAEO) are supporter farming knowledge and tourism information to cultivators with basic level in each province. Apart from previous organization, there is Sub-District Administrative Organizations (SAO) supports local enterprises for CBT development in many ways such as local public utilities (e.g., electricity, inter-village transportation, venue), tourist information promoter and fund provider.

Due to Bangplakod community had scanty experience in CBT and agrotourism management, the development of CBAT with stakeholder participation would benefit the community getting ready in this field, expand additional revenue, preserve and protect community resources, namely cultural resources, local wisdoms, local's way of life and natural resources. The conceptual framework for research is as figure 1

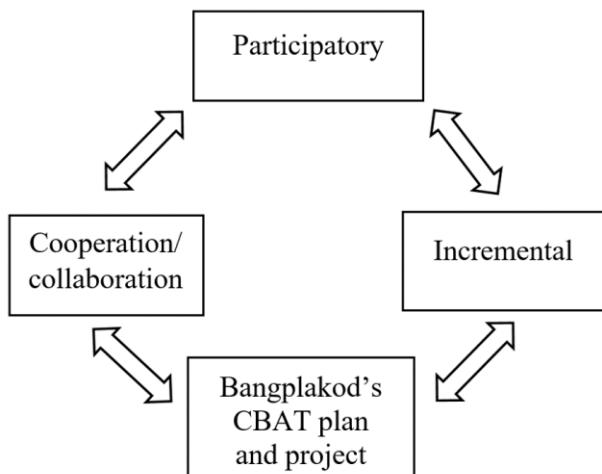


Figure 1 The conceptual framework

Source: Modified from Timothy and Tosun (2003)

Research Methodology

Methods/Techniques

This research methodology applied participatory Action Research (PAR) process included community fora, network building and workshops. All various qualitative techniques were used to enhance community participation for CBAT development. Method triangulation were used to dispel selective perception and certify the trustworthiness (DeCrop, 2004) and promoted stakeholders' participation regarding action research cycle; planning, action, observation and reflection (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992).

Participants

This research participants consisted of various groups who represented as three primary stakeholder groups; agritourism providers, DMOs, and agritourists (McGehee, 2007) included Bangplakod's village chief, village headmen, village headman assistant, sub district medical practitioners, village health volunteers, local entrepreneurs, agriculturers, local school delegates, local residents, local volunteers, Subdistrict Administration Organization's agents (SAO), Community Development's agents and pilot tourist.

Data collection

To collect research data, method triangulation was used to prevent personal and methodological bias and ensure the study's trustworthiness in qualitative method (DeCrop, 2004). The data collection process consisted of four stages as follows:

First, the researchers got into the area, familiarized with the local residents and attended local activities as participant observation since June 2016, a community fora was organized in September 2016 to obtain their opinions and their needs of CBAT with 45 people, included Bangplakod's stakeholders for participation in managing tourism.

Second, an agrotourism network meeting was organized in November 2016 at "Banbangplub community", Samutsongkram Province, to obtain managerial cooperation between the best practice agrotourism community "Banbangplub" and the action area "Bangplakod community" Banbangplub community" is approximately 5,500 acres of Kaaw Yai pomelo (colorless pulp) plantation being as provincial geographical indicator (GI) as well as an organic farm with local wisdom integration. "Banbangplub" community initiated in agrotourism since 2001. The community are well-known in being CBAT and received Thailand Tourism Awards (TAT awards) 4 times during 2008 to 2015 (TAT, 2017b). In this process 53 people included the mentioned Bangplakod's participants to share their knowledge and support each other's tasks, such as tourist hospitality and activity, public relations, and homestay management.

Third, In December 2016, The Bangplakod community workshop was organized that included 42 people of Bangplakod CBAT's stakeholders. In this stage, they planned and developed CBAT plan and project by using many qualitative tools and techniques to certify the trustworthiness as method triangulation included SWOT analysis, a problem tree, and the 4D techniques (Discovery, Dream, Design and Delivery).

Finally, on March 4-5, 2017, 65 Bangplakod CBAT's stakeholders mutual organized an agro pilot trip in Bangplakod community to serve the first group of 34 agritourists comprised of 3 CBAT experts, 22 university students who studied in tourism management major and had experience in CBAT visiting and 9 general tourists. After this program, after-action review (AAR) was used to reflect participants' opinion, help the locals to assess their performances and obtain tourists' feedback for further development.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data in these steps were analyzed by content analysis. The researchers divided up the text into meaning units, formulated codes, developed categories and themes, then described and displayed the research finding.

Results

Bangplakod CBAT's Participation

Based on the community fora, the community leaders and other related stakeholders suggested initiating CBAT by assigning community leaders to be the key persons on the community board for agrotourism with the participation of community members. Bangplakod people needed tourism management that represented the farmers' way of life and their livelihood. Agrotourism educational opportunities included agro-activity demonstrations, agro-production, and agro-experimentation sites to provide learning experiences for tourists. Local people also wanted to be involved in taking care of tourists, providing community information, planning demonstrations and presenting public relations.

The network meetings for agrotourism in the Bangplakod and Banbangplub communities helped the Bangplakod people gain direct knowledge and experience in managing CBAT from the perspectives of both tourists and hosts. This included managing local and other stakeholder participation, financial planning and sponsorship, agricultural learning, agro-activity and programs, homestay, and floating markets. The 15 agrotourism network members

included 4 members from Banbangplub community as community escorts and 11 Bangplakod village leaders who had been promoting their agrotourism.

After the workshops, the community found that the Bangplakod people wanted to preserve their original way of life with agrotourism. They had the strength from being the largest ornamental plantation areas in Thailand. Most members had agricultural knowledge and provided strong cooperation in managing tourism for the community. The location supported opportunity to attract more interested tourists caused it is located near Bangkok and other attractions in Nakhonnayok Province. Because this community did not have local guides, they provided local children and adults with guiding skills to improve their competencies. Additionally, government agencies were asked to support tourism knowledge and funding. They designed their agrotourism activities in relation to three learning bases: ornamental plants, cultivation, and bush trimming. The agrotourism committee was divided into five groups: an agricultural learning-based and agricultural expert group, a local guide group, a guest reception group, a food and beverage group, and an accommodation and transportation group. Five projects were included: (1) a guide training program that prepared students and teachers from Bangplakod Sub-District non-formal education center; (2) community learning about agricultural fundamentals, which provided 3 learning-based spots with farmers and leaders as agro-instructors; (3) tourist route-mapping, which designed visiting routes for agro places and other places in an area, such as an ornamental plant village, agricultural learning-based centers, a melon farm, Prasittiwat Temple, Santitamratbumrung Temple, and Chaokunudomprachratruamjai Market; (4) a tourism promotion program through a brochure; and (5) a homestay program that involved the development of a multi-purpose building at Prasittiwat Temple for tourists and further plans to invite their people to open their homes as homestays for small groups.

Implementation of CBAT plans and projects

The Bangplakod agrotourism pilot trip, the host cooperatively prepared the program followed all projects. The CBAT program encouraged tourist learning and experiencing in agrotourism and agro folkway. In the after-action review (AAR), showed that tourists were satisfied with the community work and enjoyed practical activities. However, the tourists advised Bangplakod Community to rearranged the time schedule for greater flexibility in outdoor activities depending on the weather. The tourists also suggested that the community should have a souvenir shop that emphasizes the community's products and value-added products that reflect the uniqueness of the community. Bangplakod Community's members found that agrotourism increased their pride and tourism management skills and promoted the participation of members, to make it successful and achieve the further development.

Discussion

The strong participation in every CBAT processes of all stakeholders supported Bangplakod's CBAT achievement. It occurred the worthwhile use of local natural resources through creative tourist activities as alternative tourism (Srithong, 2017). According to UNWTO (2005) claimed that sustainable tourism development requires participation from all stakeholders, including a strong political leader. The common cooperation from internal and external organizations in/from the community support and promote CBAT efficiently and effectively. Thongmma (2013) claimed that the participation to manage community tourism: communication: convey, discuss and find solution from brainstorming by arranging village's fora. In addition, CBAT tends to encourage the community to lead and other participants, such as residents, state and businesses sectors, to develop and support agrotourism. The Thai State's policy suggests 3 ways for communities to improve their economy and society with sustainable agriculture, product processing and community-based tourism through private

movements and government support (The local economic development and public-private collaboration committee, 2016).

CBAT allows tourist to get experience and knowledge, visit agricultural environment, and do activities with farmers including staying a night at homestay to touch the real life of farmers which related to the study of Esichaikul and Silparcha (2015) found that Thai tourists wanted to develop their knowledge, they wanted to learn agricultural life with local tourist guide or community philosopher. As well as Community tourism is the change of world tourism (TAT, 2008), trends in future tourism beyond 2030 will change to engage visitors in activities (Karnjanakit, 2017). CBAT creates local job and distributed income, increased local standard of living, bring about cherishing and pride in their occupations and folkways. It also supports the Thailand 4.0 policy to increase the quality of cultivators' life through commercialism by emphasizing their original knowledge and technology to create local innovations for tourism management that are suitable to the context and uniqueness of each area. The creativity and adding value by designing and creating products and activities can provide a new perspective that allows tourists to learn or to perform activities independently and receive theirs as souvenirs (TAT, 2015).

It also emphasizes tourists' participation in tourism activities through knowledge and experience of agrotourism based on learning activities such as practice with planting and trimming trees and studying plant species. The community should be promoting agrotourism as educational tourist attractions which have participation between tourist and host (Srithong, 2018). With participatory development of all stakeholders and relay the uniqueness of community agriculture, the community can be outstanding by reflecting the real way of rural agricultural life to tourists.

Conclusion

The CBAT has to begin with requirement of community's members and the participation of stakeholders from planning until monitoring process to ensure the sustainable development. The achievement of CBAT management involves a process of learning through community participation that includes consuming resources reasonably in accordance with the community and its unique contexts and influencing community education about CBAT management. CBAT also encouraged the strong participation of local communities to manage tourism independently and bring their own agricultural resources to create value, provide benefits and sustain the economy, culture, society and the environment through tourism. For the Thai tourism industry, CBAT may be one tourism application to support and promote prosperous tourism on the basis of Thai agriculture while distributing benefits and revenue to the communities.

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