

# Community Participation in Developing Tourism Attractions in Watthana Nakhon, Sa Kaeo, Thailand

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## Abstract

This research has objectives to study on the conditions of Watthana Nakhon Sub-district community's context, the capacity of community in developing tourism attractions, and format in developing tourism attractions with the participation of Watthana Nakhon Sub-district, Watthana Nakhon District, Sa Kaeo Province. This is a Participatory Action Research. The sample groups of 50 people are consisting of representatives from governmental organizations, representatives from local administrative office, local leaders, and local people from Watthana Nakhon Sub-district, Watthana Nakhon District, Sa Kaeo Province. There were three tools utilizing in this research, which are 1) an observation form, 2) group interview, and 3) focus group discussion. This research utilized Descriptive Data Analysis method. The results found that most of the area of Watthana Nakhon Sub-district community is a low land, most of the population is doing agriculture, and the community is famous for producing roasted sticky rice in bamboo joints, wickerwork, and jasmine rice. In terms of community's capacity in developing tourism attractions, the researchers found that the community is located on the main road of Sa Kaeo province, which there are many tourists passing by. There are many important religious and historical sited. The local leaders are very strong. Community's products have the capacity to be developed as tourism attractions with the participation of corporation network and people in the community. In terms of the format for developing community's tourism attractions, the researchers found that tourism attractions in the community can be developed by using community's products, which are developed from social capital and local wisdom, to get tourists attractions and connecting tourism routes with important sited in Watthana Nakhon Sub-district community.

**Keywords:** Participation, Community-Based Tourism, Tourism Attractions

## Introduction

Tourism is an industry that playing an important role in the development of Thai economy since the past until today. Tourism has always been integrated with the country's development in every aspect. Therefore, there is an integration of tourism in defining national development strategy for the country's stability, wealth, and sustainability. Tourism industry has high rate of expansion and it is a source of income, which brings foreign currencies, job creation, and distribution of income and wealth to the region. On 17 April 2009, the Council of Ministers reached the conclusion to put tourism in the national agenda (National Tourism Development Plan, 2011). Nowadays, there are various forms of tourism activities. Besides for leisure, tourists can gain knowledge from tourism attractions (Chatchakul., 2014). The tendency of changes in the global market has created marketing opportunity for Thai tourism industry in developing tourism to be relevant and responsive to the changes of tourism. The increasing demand for traveling to gain more experience causes many countries to improve

their products, services, and tourism routes. The changes of tourist behaviors create many new fields of tourism. Moreover, many countries have started to add more variety of tourism in order to respond to the different preferences (National Tourism Development Plan, 2017). Sa Kaeo province is located on the eastern border of Thailand. There are many historical objects and sites, as well as natural resources. It is considered as the gate to the Kingdom of Cambodia through the connection of transportation and tourism of the two countries. There is Rong Kluea market as the biggest border market in Southeast Asia with a long history since the Dvaravati period. It has been the center of living, art, culture, and traditions of people from many different races. The trade with the neighboring countries has been existed since long time. The area is close to Angor Wat, one of the seventh wonder of the world. Also, there are routes connecting to Bangkok, which are not very long. From the tourism information of Sa Kaeo province in 2011, there were 907,808 Thai tourists and 147,999 foreign tourists visited Sa Kaeo. Thai and foreign visitors brought revenue to the tourism of Sa Kaeo province of 2,150 million baht/year and 325 million baht/year respectively. The total revenue is 2,475 million baht/year (Sa Kaeo Province Border Trade Service Center, 2018). From this, it shows that Sa Kaeo has a lot of original tourism assets, but still lack of development in terms of tourism competitiveness and participation from related organizations in seriously developing community's tourism attractions.

Tourism Authority of Thailand sets the main policies to support tourism by marketing operation, attraction development for standard and valuable for tourism, facility and service development for standard and satisfying tourists, and expanding tourist area to be distributed in the local area (Warakunwit, 2003). New model of tourism development in the community is to meet demand and substitute traditional tourism and it needs participation of people in the community, representatives of local administrative organizations, and relevant departments to participate in tourism development and support. This can be done by participating in tourism resource management (Jittangwatana, 2005).

Participation of community and corporation network is very important in driving the development of community's tourism attractions. Therefore, people in the community and representative from local administrative offices and educational institutions should take the important role in participating in tourism development and promotion. It is important to encourage people to participate in organizing tourism activities, as people are the owner of local wisdom and resources. It would be difficult for the development of community's tourism attractions to become successful, if there were no participation from the local people. Therefore, participation of the community is an important factor for a sustainable development of the community's tourism (Mahapitakate, 1995).

From the government policy that gives importance on tourism and improvement of community in order to be able to respond to the government policy, which relevant to the 3<sup>rd</sup> issue of Sa Kaeo Province Strategy: restore tourism attractions and improve tourism facilities in order to support the environment in becoming ecotourism attractions and connecting Khmer history and culture. There is one of the strategies that relevant to this research, which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> strategy: to promote public sector network in taking participation in tourism and creating network to connect tourism both domestic and international, 3<sup>rd</sup> strategy: to improve the capacity of tourism attractions by restoring and preserving the beauty and diversity of tourism attractions, especially in terms of cultural and historical aspects, 6<sup>th</sup> strategy: to encourage the development of tourism personnel and operators, and 7<sup>th</sup> strategy: to develop tourism activities and format to be more various in order to create more alternatives (Sa Kaeo Provincial Office, 2019).

Watthana Nakhon sub-district community, Watthana Nakhon district, Sa Kaeo province is one of the communities of Sa Kaeo province that situated around important tourist attractions such as Nakhon Tham Temple, Baan Prao community (Khao Lam), Statue of King Naresuan.

In the community, there is a development of local products to become community's products and tourism attractions.

From the first group meeting, the researchers discussed with the sample groups, which are the representatives from local administrative offices and local leaders of all 14 villages in Watthana Nakhon sub-district and found some problems that need to be solved and improved including the lack of participation in the development to add value to the products and the lack of participation in developing community's tourism attractions. In this meeting, the council has specified the desire for community's participation to support the community to become an important tourist attraction of the province and an improvement of community's product value.

## **Research Objectives**

1. To study on the conditions of Watthana Nakhon sub-district community, Watthana Nakhon district, Sa Kaeo province
2. To study on the capacity of community in developing tourism attractions at Watthana Nakhon sub-district community, Watthana Nakhon district, Sa Kaeo province
3. To study on the format of community's tourism attractions development with the participation of Watthana Nakhon sub-district community, Watthana Nakhon district, Sa Kaeo province

## **Literature Review**

Researchers have studied on related content, concepts, and theories in support of this research, which consist of participatory concepts and tourism attraction development concepts.

Participatory concept is referred to the participation of community in managing from the beginning process, which the participation should be completed from the beginning until the last process. That is to say, it should start from self-consciousness and taking the responsibility in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, receiving benefits, and distribute profit to the community directly. In this case, people will participate in different activities like planning, making decision, proceeding activities. In order to have a fair evaluation and receiving fair profits, people should have freedom and willingness in participation in all process and have the sense of belonging to the process that will bring success to the development. This is considered to be a practice and development of people (Choibamroong 2009). Therefore, participation means taking part in receiving profits from the development by participating in creating the development and participating in the process of making decision for the development.

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourism as any travel which according to 3 international conditions which consist of 1) traveling from a regular residence to other places temporarily, 2) travel is done willingly, not by forced, and 3) traveling for any purpose other than career or income purposes. These definitions were set in 1963 during Travel and Tourism Meeting for members to consider guidelines to share understanding and have the same standard. Moreover, to collect related information on tourism which will be benefit for management and effectiveness of tourism industry management (Warakunwit, 2015).

Participation of the tourism community is supporting the local community to participate in sustainable tourism by providing the community with the benefit of income from tourism and can maintain environment sustainably (Tangchitcharoen, 1999).

Cohen and Uphoff (1980) classified the participation into 4 types as follows;

1. Decision-making

2. Implementation consists of management resource support and collaboration for cooperation.

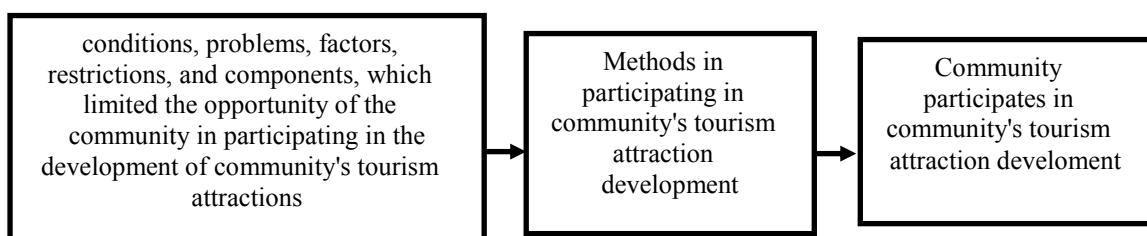
3. Benefits no matter if it is object, social, or personal benefits.

4. Evaluation

Tourism attraction development concept can only become successful with recognition in giving importance of tourism promotion, tourism attraction management for good conditions and services, and tourism capacity development by community and related organizations. For a sustainable development of Thai tourism, it should start with creating roles in participation of all level of associations to participate in tourism development of their own community with the support from governmental organization, private sector, and people in the community to develop tourism attractions. In order to achieve the goals and respond to the needs of the community, there should be an encouragement in creating network in order to build a mechanism to drive an energetic and efficient operation for a sustainable tourism development, which will lead to a long-term development in working in the future (Choibamroog, 2009).

### **Research Framework**

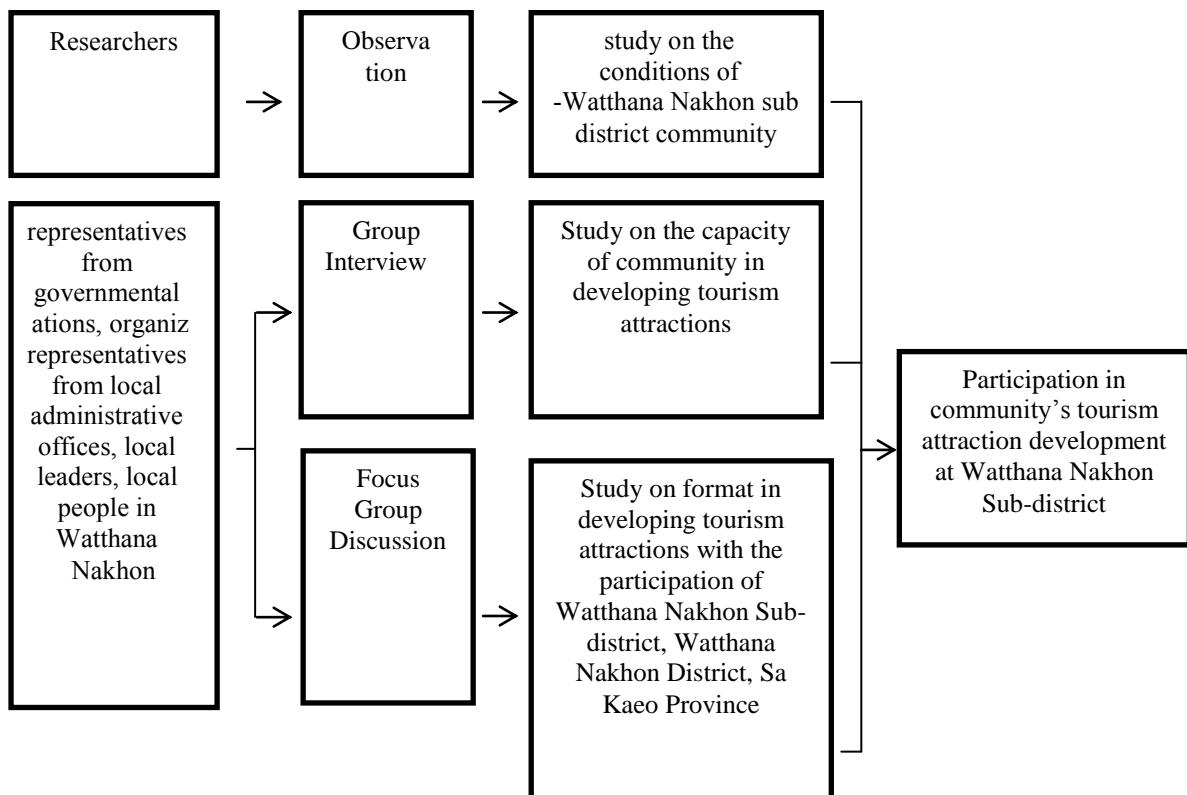
This is a qualitative research. The researchers defined the research framework according to the Participatory Action Research concept, which has the following detail:



**Figure 1** Research Framework

### **Research Methodology**

A research on Community Participation in Developing Tourism Attractions in Watthana Nakhon Sub-district, Watthana Nakhon District, Sa Kaeo Province is a qualitative research in order to study on the conditions of Watthana Nakhon Sub-district community's context, the capacity of community in developing tourism attractions, and format in developing tourism attractions with the participation of Watthana Nakhon Sub-district, Watthana Nakhon District, Sa Kaeo Province, which the process in conducting this research is categorized as follow:



**Figure 2** Process in Research Operation

### Population and sample groups

Population that used in this study is consisting of 50 people representatives from governmental organizations, representatives from local administrative offices, local leaders, people in the community of Watthana Nakhon sub-district, Watthana district, Sa Kaeo province.

Sample groups consist of representatives from each population group. So, the sample groups were defined in order to collect data. The researchers employed purposive sampling method as follow: 5 representatives from governmental organizations, 10 representatives from local administrative offices, 15 local leaders 15 local people, 5 researchers

### Research Instruments

**Observation:** In this research, two types of observations were used: Participant observation consists of 3 processes, which are observing, questioning, and recording in order to get the actual data from the condition of the community. Non-participant observation is an observation from outside by not participating in the activities in order collects data without anyone noticing to study the condition of Watthana Nakhon sub-district community.

**Group Interview:** The data is collecting from talking with interviewees on the issues related to the general context of Watthana Nakhon sub-district, which there was a moderator to bring up topics to discuss with interviewees, whom selected from the defined population in order to study on the condition of Watthana Nakhon sub-district.

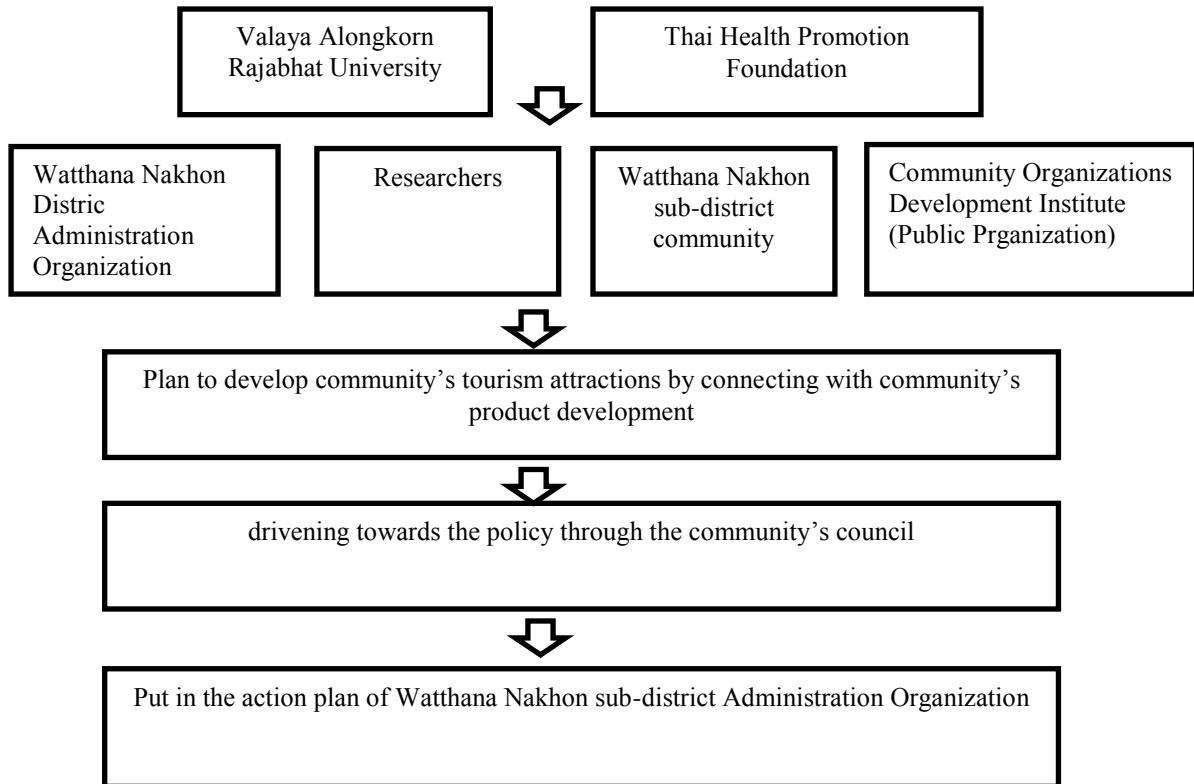
**Focus Group Discussion:** This is a study on the format of community's tourism attraction development with the participation of Watthana Nakhon sub-district community, Watthana Nakhon district, Sa Kaeo province. In order to arrange a focus group, the researchers selected participants from the defined population, which the conversation was defined according to research framework and objectives.

## Research Results

From the condition of Watthana Nakhon sub-district, the community is located in the central part of Sa Kaeo province, which divided ruling area into 14 villages: Moo.1 Baan Prao, Moo.2 Baan Hua Chang, Moo.3 Baan None Jig, Moo.4 Baan Sra Lop, Moo.5 Baan Muang, Moo.6 Baan Nong Kum, Moo.7 Baan Jig, Moo.8 Baan Ang Phai, Moo.9 Baan Thang Luang, Moo.10 Baan Watthana Nakhon, Moo.11 Baan Nong Klong, Moo.12 Baan Nong Saeng, Moo.13 Baan Nern Phasuk, Moo.14 Baan Wangsiew. Most of the area is low plain with natural waterways passing through the area. Most of the area is used for rice plantation. Most of the people are doing agriculture. The community is famous for producing roasted sticky rice in bamboo joints, wickerwork, and jasmine rice. There is an important religious site, which is Nakhon Tham temple, and an important historical site, which is the statue of King Naresuan. There are many group of products, but without any official registration and connection with the tourism attractions of the community.

In terms of community's capacity in developing tourism attractions, the researchers found that the community is located on the main road of Sa Kaeo province, between Muang district and Aranyaprathet district, which there are many tourist cars passing by. There is an important religious site, Nakhon Tham temple, where Luang Pho Khao or Luang Pho Poon Buddha image is located. This is an ancient Buddha image with an age over 100 years. The Buddha image is sitting on the haunches. It is widely spoken among people in the area about the miracle and sanctity of this Buddha image. When Luang Pho Khao Buddha image was brought from an abandoned temple in 1943, there was a monk saw tears dropping from the Buddha image's eyes. At the same time, it was raining heavily. Moreover, in side the vihara, there are model of Buddha's footprint and relics, which were brought from Phamadullaracha Mahaviharn temple, Rattanapura, Sri Lanka. Every year from January to February, Watthana Nakhon district arranges a parade of relics and pay respect to Luang Pho Khao. In addition, the community still has another important historical site, which is the statue of King Naresuan that located in Chalerm Phrakiat Park in an area of 720 rai. The statue shows King Naresuan is standing with his right hand raising a sword over his head. People of Watthana Nakhon participated in building this statue in 1994 for the remembrance of King Naresuan's devine grace when he was mustering to set up a camp in Thamnop district, which believed to be current Watthana Nakhon district, in order to fight with Phraya Lawaeg of Khmer, who was rebellious against Ayutthaya Kingdom. The capacity of community in terms of personnel is there are strong leaders. Interesting community's products are including riceberry, roasted sticky rice in bamboo joints, krayasat, artificial flowers, fertilizer from fresh vegetable, and plastic wickerwork, which can be developed to be community's tourism attractions. In order to develop tourism attractions of Watthana Nakhon sub-district community, the participation of governmental corporation network and local people is required.

In terms of format in developing tourism attractions with the participation of community, the researchers found that tourism attractions in the community can be developed by using community's products, which are developed from social capital and local wisdom, to get tourists attractions and connecting tourism routes with important sited in Watthana Nakhon Sub-district community. It can be started from officially registering these groups, creating community's product development plan, community's tourism attractions development plan to connect with product development. Bring the registered groups and community's tourism attractions development plan to connect with product development to drive the policy through Watthana Nakhon community's council and push it towards putting the plan for community's tourism attractions development to connect with product development into the action plan of Watthana Nakhon district administration organization. For the sustainability and continuity, the format in developing tourism attractions with the participation of corporation network and community is as follow:



**Figure 3** Format in developing community's tourism attractions of corporation network and community

## Suggestions

Local administrative organizations should take part in participating of tourism development and liaising with people in the community in order to create corporation in organizing a meeting for community and related organizations to come together to make plan on effective tourism development.

There should be a system to create local development plan, encouraging on job training and local wisdom, and a meeting to create a good understanding on registering community product groups officially.

There should be a creation for a precise community plan for tourism by organizing tourism attraction management system together with community or related organizations.

Arrange promotional activities about the community's tourism both within the community and outside to create awareness. Publicize information systematically in order to make the community widely known and promote the attractions to bring more tourists.

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