Investigating Gaps in Sustainable Community Tourism: A Case Study of Local Communities in the Vicinity of Khon Kaen Zoo[1]

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Abstract

This article describes the impacts of tourism on local communities and the obstacles to sustainable community tourism planning and development. The study found that different areas show different impacts of tourism and also different levels of participation in tourism planning and development. For an area be a destination of sustainable community tourism, various stakeholders, especially local participants, must be involved in tourism planning and development from the early to the final stages.

Keywords: sustainable community tourism, local participation, impacts of tourism

บทคัดย่อ

จุดมุ่งหมายของบทความนี้เพื่อนำเสนอผลกระทบจากการท่องเที่ยวที่ส่งผลชุมชน ท้องถิ่นและช่องว่างที่เป็นอุปสรรคต่อการวางแผนการและพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืน การศึกษา พบว่า แต่ละพื้นที่ได้รับผลกระทบจากการท่องเที่ยวที่แตกต่างกัน การมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชนต่อ การวางแผนและพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวมีระดับที่แตกต่างกัน การท่องเที่ยวโดยชุมชนอย่างยั่งยืน นั้น ผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียต้องมีส่วนร่วมในการวางแผนและพัฒนาตั้งแต่ต้น โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งการ มีส่วนร่วมของชุมชน

คำสำคัญ: การพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวโดยชุมชนอย่างยั่งยืน การมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชน ผลกระทบ จากการท่องเที่ยว

Introduction

Currently, tourism is generating significant foreign exchange earnings, driving local investment in tourism related services and infrastructure, and creating jobs. On the other hand, partly because of the uneven capacity to plan for, and manage tourism's negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts, the resources underpinning the national tourism industry are in danger of being permanently damaged (UNESCO, 2014).

Several studies have revealed a diversity of negative impacts caused by tourism, ranging from most obvious physical impacts such as; environmental degradation, resource depletion, and pollution, to more subtle and complicated ones such as; socio-cultural impacts, unfair income distribution, and increases in drug use, and crime. Numerous articles show tourism's potential destructive impact on societies, culture and environment (Palomino, 2003).

Over the last two decades, alternative forms of tourism, with fewer impacts on the environment and society, began to emerge (The Thailand Community Based Tourism Institute: CBT-I, 2013) which is called 'Community-Based Tourism (CBT)' and it has been developed widely in South East Asia, including Thailand. There are many communities which have successfully developed CBT; however, some are defined as unsuccessful destinations, because their community-based tourism needs to integrate more sustainable views for long-term development.

Khaosuankwang, a small district of Khon Kaen province, is becoming an emerging destination in Khon Kaen, after the Khon Kaen Zoo was established officially by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in 2009. In terms of tourist demand, numbers of tourists have been increasing every single year, both from domestic and international, for the supply side (e.g. local community and local administration), there are several factors that obstruct sustainable tourism development, because local people still have no direction, and sufficient knowledge, to support and provide service to tourists, participate in tourism planning and development, and to cope with

impacts of tourism on local ways of lives. Therefore, it is significant to study and find out the solutions in order to develop this destination to be sustainable extensively.

1.1 Description of area

According to the geographical area, there are eight villages which are affected by tourism since the establishment of Khon Kaen Zoo, which covers two local administrative areas: Khoasuankwang sub-district (Ban Khaosuankwang, Ban Srichomchaoen, Ban Nongkung, Ban Jomponpattana and Ban Nongtana) and Khammuang sub-district (Ban Tangpad, Ban Hauybak, Ban Paprao, Ban Nonsanga, Ban Nonthong and Ban Maisrisuk) (Khaosuankwang Municipality, 2014).

According to figure 1, there are two gates to reach Khon Kaen Zoo. The first gate is used for the tourists travelling from Udonthani, which pass four villages; Ban Nongkung, Ban Srichomchaoen, Ban Maisrisuk and Ban Nongtana. The other gate is the main entrance, which is used for tourists travelling from Khon Kaen, passing Ban Tangpad, Ban Khaosuankwang, Ban Paprao, Ban Maisrisuk and Ban Nongtana. According to the geographical area, local people living around those villages will have both direct and indirect effects from an emerging tourism.

Khon Kaen Zoo is surrounded by two sub-districts which are Khaosuankwang and Khammuang sub-districts. The populations are 3,613 and 3,107 respectively (ThaiTambon, 2014). This new emerging tourist destination reflects interesting views in terms of tourism impacts and sustainable tourism development.
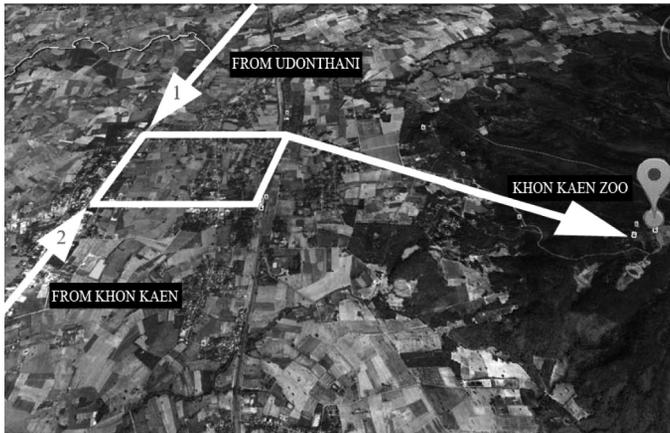
Figure 1: Map of gats to Khon Kaen Zoo

Research findings

The research findings revealed two significant points, which are the impacts of tourism on local communities, and gaps in sustainable community tourism in Khon Kaen Zoo, as will be discussed accordingly.

2.1 Tourism impacts on local communities

Having observed via the researcher at an early stage, in-depth interviews were applied, to understand impacts of tourism on local communities. There were eight representatives of each tourism sector selected to be interviewees, which were two local administrations, two private businesses, two representatives of village headmen, and two representatives of local people.

Government sector: The government point of view about impacts of tourism was positive. Both representatives agreed that tourism brought prosperity to local communities, especially in terms of economic growth.

"*The increasing of tourist numbers will be definitely positive for local communities, because they can make more money through tourism activities*".

Local businesses: The local businesses stated that the impacts of tourism provided both negative and positive effects on local communities.

"*As a private business, we are both owners of business and we are a part of communities. Our products were sold and distributed to customers both for local and international arrivals. What impacts us is we gain more money by selling, especially festive time and long holiday. Although there are a lot of tourists, comparing to the big restaurants, ours are still unattractive for visitors because the restaurants are situated along the main roadside, and they normally stop at the well-known restaurants. It comes up with how to attract tourists and income can be scattered thoroughly*".

Village headmen: They revealed the impacts of tourism that affected local communities.

"We are directly affected by tourism since it started. At first, there were some people in my village who worked at the zoo, and some sold local food at the zoo. It was good news for us initially. People had more extra income." said the first village headman.

"But lately, not many local people work there because the labour has been outsourced, run by private companies. It is hard for local people to approach the job compared to the earlier years when the zoo first opened" the second man said.
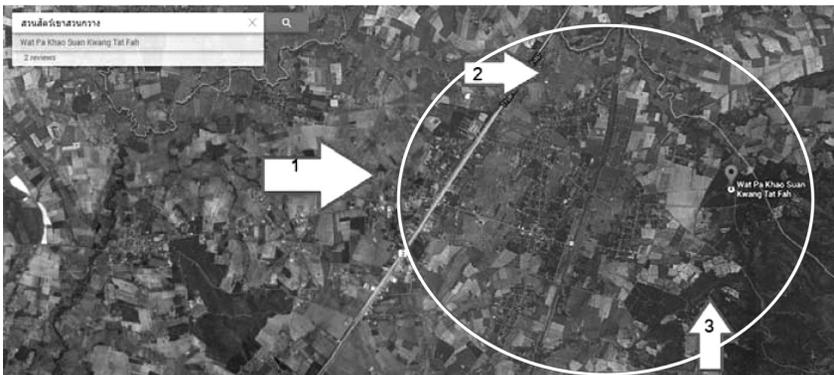
Local people: The impacts of tourism that affect the local communities will be addressed accordingly.

"*Normally, we are agriculturists. During the time of growing crops and harvesting season, we will work on our land, but besides that we sell local food from the jungle, such as mushrooms, baby bamboo shoots and other things. The extra income helps us sometimes. But it is just occasionally due to the seasonality.*"

According to the view of tourism impacts, it showed different perspectives from different groups of respondents on how tourism impacts on local communities. The government side presented positive impacts of tourism on the local community in terms of local economic growth. However, they did not reflect the negative impacts of tourism

because their major jobs must be complied with the government policy. Similar to local businesses and local people, the main impact of tourism was the better economic growth which was consistent with Andereck et al. (2005) that the impacts of tourism on emerging destinations will comprise of many dimensions such as ecological, economic and social impacts, but they did not mention about better quality of life since the tourism has been emerging, which was contradicted with Getz (1994) and Getz and Jamal (1995) that tourism impacts must be positive for local well-being. However, although there were better opportunities for local people to get jobs at the zoo, currently it is more difficult to secure a position there.

Subsequently, focus groups were employed after in-depth interview had been conducted in order to recheck the data. Respondents were divided into three groups (eight to fifteen people per group) according to their local residences. The first group composed of Ban Jompon Pattana, Ban Tangpad and Ban Khaosuankwang. The second group was Ban Nongkung, Ban Srichomchaoen and Ban Paprao. The last group was Ban Maisrisuk and Ban Nongtana, Ban Angthong, Ban Nonsanga and Ban Hauybak (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Impacts of tourism on different clusters categorized by areas

According to the findings (see appendix), three different areas have different points of views about tourism impacts. The first cluster

was directly affected by tourism in terms of economic improvement. Although there were some people showing some opposing views, but setting of standard might be the proper way out for them.

"Because our area situated nearby Mitraparp Road, so we are affected directly by tourism especially increasing of income from selling our local products (roast chicken)" said restaurant owner.

"There should be a strategic plan to promote local tourism and make it fair especially the price of products. The standard is needed" said the merchant.

The second cluster is highly concerned about environmental and social impacts since tourism emerged**.**

"Since tourism is growing, more people visited the zoo noticeably. If they travel from the northern direction such as Laos, Udonthani and Nongkai, they will use the 2nd entrance which will pass Ban Nongkung, Ban Paprao and Ban Nongtana beforeing reaching the zoo. The problem is there are more cars, busses, coaches and the others that drive pretty fast. Sometimes it is noisy because big buss are normally use this way' mentioned agriculturist.

"There should be a plan to manage visitors and provide areas for local activities" supported local governor.

The last group received social impacts since they have compared with other destinations. Both second and third groups provide similar suggestions, that long-term plans for locals and cooperation from various stakeholders needs to be considered.

"Because we have agricultural areas nearby the zoo, especially sugar cane. We have an idea that after visiting the zoo, there will be tourists come to experience the process of growing sugar cane and also sell our products to the tourists. As you can see the areas nearby the zoo covered by sugar cane field and some rice field. But the problem is we have natural resources but lack of knowledge to develop our area to attract tourists. It's not only roast chicken we have, but also other products that need to be promoted by the government" mentioned village headman.

All tourism impacts found in the designated areas were consistent with Budruk et al. (2014) (economic and social impacts) and Mowforth & Munt (1998) (environmental dimensions). Moreover, life safety and security was another impact that was found in this area. Most interestingly, local people were stimulated by tourism and desired to gain a better understanding, with more knowledge in tourism planning and development, which had not been mentioned before. It illustrated that local people realize the importance of community and tourism development.

2.2 Gaps in sustainable community tourism

According to the study, there were several gaps which obstruct sustainable tourism development at Khon Kaen Zoo, which were local participation in tourism planning and development, cooperation from various sectors in tourism planning and development and local people and knowledge on sustainable community tourism.

Local participation in tourism planning and development

The local administrator revealed that as a role and job description in administrative level, being involved in tourism planning and development was quite high. As a local administrator, the main role was to distribute information to the local communities, and receive policy from central government. Only one thing that can take an action was developing the well-being of local people in the areas where governed. Turning to the local communities, businesses and village headmen, they disclosed that the level of participation in tourism planning and development was very low. Most informants did not have a chance to be involved in planning and policy.

Since the topic of participation had been raised, the researcher conducted the Likert Scale of participation which was divided into 5 levels in order to approach the quantitative view. The findings showed that over 80 per cent of all respondents were not involved in tourism planning and development because they were not at an administrative level.

According to the results, the level of local participation in tourism was undermined. This showed the consistent of Stabler (1997)

and Blackstock (2005) and that tourism industries will be successful if local communities are helpful, because local community plays an important role in tourism development.

Cooperation from various sectors in tourism planning and development

Both government sector and local businesses shared a similar perspective about gap in tourism planning that:

"*We need high cooperation from various sectors such as educational institutes, local private and public sectors to be involved, and the most important sector is communities. Whatever we can support, we never hesitate to do that, but we need help because only one sector alone cannot do everything.''*

Furthermore, representatives of local people provide ideas about sustainable community tourism that they have no clue how to do something creative. They need some sectors, or any related parties to assist them to develop their areas to be sustained which was in accord with Choi & Sirakaya (2006) that multi-stakeholder involvement at all levels of planning and policy-making was needed for sustainable tourism development.

Local people and knowledge on sustainable community tourism

The private business exposed their concern was setting the standard and quality control of providing service to the tourists, as well as to improve the business to be better known. "*As a private business sector, local economy is steadily increasing. What we need to control and make an agreement is setting quality of service, do the marketing to promote Khaosuankwang to be known widely. In a couple of years, ASEAN will become one and language is very crucial for us to improve in order to communicate with the foreign visitors.*" Another recommendation for sustainable community development is '"*Educational background of local people is still low. There is still lack of understanding the word of 'sustainable' and also do not understand the role of locals as a host communities.*"

Moreover, the representatives of village headmen agreed that local communities needed to be improved, such as attitude and perception about sustainable community tourism. Communities should be more involved in tourism planning and development because they were affected both direct and indirectly by tourism. They needed the hands from various sectors to develop their ideas and encouraged to participate. The most important was awareness and knowledge that need to be addressed.

According to the above mentioned by tourism stakeholders, it is interesting that although they were not involved in tourism planning at the early stage, they were eager to improve and develop their businesses to be accorded with the tourism policy. Furthermore, knowledge background in tourism is one of the crucial factors, and this is the aspirations and challenges of the community, for tourism needs to be of concern and supported by several sectors both public and private organisations.

Recommendations

Having reviewed the study, the aim of this research is to investigate impacts of tourism on local communities and gaps that obstruct sustainable community tourism planning and development such as economic, environment, safety impacts and knowledge gap (educational impact). According to the mentioned gaps, two principle recommendations will be addressed for the local government policy and future research as followings.

Recommendations for policy making

For sustainable community development, the cooperation from various parts of sectors is the key factor to develop local communities. Firstly, the educational institutions should take part in local communities by conducting research with local communities. Thus, knowledge and local wisdom will be integrated to local community development. Secondly, local government should encourage local people to be involved in planning and development, because policy will not be effective without the local cooperation.

Recommendations for future research

In the primary research, the author found that local communities were quite helpful in assisting the author to carry out the survey and interview, since the interview was conducted in a designated area with security provided by the local government. It found out that interviewees felt comfortable and valued when they were invited to the meeting at the office of municipality. Therefore, data collection should be held at suitable times, and places for both the respondents and the researcher to feel comfortable.

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Appendix

Table 1: Impact of Tourism on Local Communities

Group	Details	List of impacts	Suggestions
1	-'*Because our area situated nearby Mitraparp Road, so we are affected directly by tourism especially increasing of income from selling our local products (roast chicken).*' (Self-employed: Restaurant owner) -'*Before going to the zoo, tourists or visitors usually drop by local restaurants to have lunch or buy roast chicken. However, some problems occur. For example, there are a lot of local roast chicken restaurants emerging (SMEs) and the price of their products is different to others, because they have a cut price in order to attract more people to come. This is unfair for the big restaurant because we have different cost of selling.*' (Merchant 1) -'*We used to have a meeting about how to control the price of local products but it is unsuccessful because they just concentrate on their own businesses. For example, the restaurants that have reputation, people have known about them already, so this doesn't affect their businesses comparing to the small local restaurants.*' (Local Government 1)	**Economic impact**	-'*There should be a strategic plan to promote local tourism and make it fair especially the price of products. The standard is needed.*' (**Village Headman 1**) -'*The local government solely is not enough for planning and development. Various sectors such as educational institutions, business owners and local communities should cooperate or work together for sustainable tourism. If we still have no clue about this, it leads to failure.*' (**Merchant 2**)

Group	Details	List of impacts	Suggestions
2	-'*Since tourism is growing, more people visited the zoo noticeably. If they travel from the northern direction such as Laos, Udonthani and Nongkai, they will use the 2nd entrance which will pass Ban Nongkung, Ban Paprao and Ban Nongtana beforeing reaching the zoo. The problem is there are more cars, busses, coaches and the others that drive pretty fast. Sometimes it is noisy because big buss will use this way.'* **(Agriculturist 1)** -'*This road is pretty small because it is normally used by local residents. Most houses are situated along the road. The road is also used for several activities such as making merit, local activities and playground for children. We feel unsafe for our kids and it creates pollution as well.'* **(Village headman 2).**	**- Safety impacts** **- Environ-mental impacts**	-'*Only one thing I see now is to widen the road.'* **(Assistant of village headman 1)** -'*The budget must be providing for this area to develop road systems for the long-term plan.'* **(Work for hiring).** -'*There should be a plan to manage visitors and provide areas for local activities.'* **(Local government 2)**

Group	Details	List of impacts	Suggestions
3	-'*We are affected only for the festive time such as Songkran or any special occasions. Route of travelling will be one way in order to avoid traffic jam. The road will be crowded but it's acceptable for us.'* **(Village headman 3)** -*Because we have agricultural areas nearby the zoo, especially sugar cane. We have an idea that after visiting the zoo, there will be tourists come to experience the process of growing sugar cane and also sell our products to the tourists. As you can see the areas nearby the zoo covered by sugar cane field and some rice field. But the problem is we have natural resources but lack of knowledge to develop our area to attract tourists. It's not only roast chicken we have, but also other products that need to be promoted by the government.'* **(Agriculturist 2)** -'*Comparing to other places I have travelled, there have nothing but local communities operate on their own with good support of both private and public sectors. Now, we have natural resources, zoo and roast chicken but we don't have clue or vision for the long-term tourism development.* **(Village headman 4)**	-**Knowledge gap (social impact)**	-'*We need plans for local residents to manage and tackle problems that will occur if there are more people in years to come. Moreover, locals should understand tourists and tourists need to understand the way of local living as well.'* **(Village headman 4)** -'*Stakeholders must work together and share information with the local people as well. We don't know what to do, we need someone to guide us.'* **(Agriculturist 2)**