

THE MECHANISM FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF BANG SAEN, THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world, and it is predicted that the significance of tourism will increase in the future. The predicted growth in tourism does not only provide greater opportunities for spreading prosperity but also presents considerable challenges and potential threats to the natural and socio-cultural environment on which tourism sustainability is dependent. The researcher explores a proper mechanism for sustainable tourism development. This research aims to explore the mechanism of sustainable tourism development with the intent to study the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders for sustaining the tourism system on which they are dependent. The purpose of this study is 1) to understand how to achieve sustainable tourism development, 2) to investigate the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders for sustaining the whole tourism system, and 3) to analyze the mechanisms for sustaining the whole tourism system.

Data was gathered by employing different methodologies: 1) extensive document survey for the stakeholders at the global, national, and local level; 2) in-depth interview for stakeholders in the local level; 3) and a visitor questionnaire. The researcher chose 74 interviewees for in-depth interview and 399 participants to complete the questionnaire. The roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders and mechanisms employed by them were analyzed based on information from various documents. Content analysis of qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews was conducted by analyzing the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and the mechanisms used by them. The data from questionnaire was analyzed by descriptive statistics, frequency, and cross-tabulation to understand the nature of visitors to Bang Saen.

This study showed that every stakeholder tries to compete with each other, even though some stakeholders sometimes cooperate with each other, and take a suitable role and responsibility through controlling mechanisms and resources in order to pursue their own interests. However, it is impossible to sustain tourism growth that pursues capital accumulation endlessly as the goal because the pursuit of profits causes the deterioration of natural capital stock at international, national, and local levels. The stakeholders must realize the limit of natural capital stock and its tourism dependency, and maintaining natural capital stock must be set as the central goal of policy making of tourism development at any level. Therefore, they should aim for positive impacts in the economic and social dimensions to maximize the environmental dimension in tourism development rather than trying to balance those dimensions in order to achieve sustainable tourism development. However, this requires shifting the paradigm of investment of tourism supporters and producers in tourism development from quantitative expansion to qualitative improvement.

Tourism supporters, producers, consumers, and decomposers at each level played similar roles and took similar responsibilities because most roles and responsibilities are basically coordinated towards the pursuit of profits. Consequently, the roles and responsibilities for maintaining natural capital stock and reducing the negative impacts on the stock are of secondary importance or ignored. If the stakeholders ignore reducing the negative impacts on the environment and do not share the role and responsibility of tourism decomposer, while shifting the role and responsibility onto others, the whole tourism system will collapse sooner or later. The tourism supporters must inject the five capitals into the entire tourism system to create actions that cause the stakeholders to reduce the negative impacts on natural capital stock and collaborate to maintain natural capital stock.

Despite the importance of collaborative actions among the stakeholders to maintain natural capital stock, they are usually not able to take the role and responsibility of tourism decomposers together due to the absence or improper use of mechanisms that set processes towards sustainable development. To set a process for sustaining the whole tourism system, tourism supporters at all levels must consider the five capitals in tourism management and inject the five capitals into the entire tourism system in order to create actions that achieve sustainable tourism development and share political powers through allowing the stakeholders to accumulate the necessary capitals. A cross-scale collaborative network helps create proper and better capital flows that reduce the limitations, develop proper mechanisms suitable to local circumstances, and foster a concerted action on the improvement of environmental performance and maintenance of the environment. This is dependent on fairness of the supporters whether they determine to share political power and allow the stakeholders to accumulate the necessary capitals in order to mitigate environmental degradation and to maintain natural capital stock at a steady state by developing and employing mechanisms that work for sustainable development.

KEY WORDS: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT / FIVE CAPITALS / CAPITAL FLOWS / BANG SAEN

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