

การวิเคราะห์องค์ประกอบของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศ: ประโยชน์เพื่อการค้นคว้าวิจัยและการพัฒนาในอนาคต

An Analysis of Ecotourism Mix: Its Benefits to the Future Research and Development

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ในช่วงระยะเวลาหลายสิบปีที่ผ่านมา การท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศได้รับความสนใจอย่างแพร่หลายทั้งในวงการวิชาการและภาคอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยว เนื่องจากเป็นรูปแบบการท่องเที่ยวที่นำไปสู่การพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืน ทั้งนี้งานวิจัยและการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศในช่วงที่ผ่านมาได้ดำเนินการตามแนวคิดและหลักการของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศ อย่างไรก็ตาม การวิเคราะห์แนวคิดและหลักการดังกล่าวเพื่อให้สังคม (เช่น นักวิชาการ หน่วยงานภาครัฐ ภาคธุรกิจ และชุมชน) มีความรู้ความเข้าใจอย่างถ่องแท้ถึงองค์ประกอบและขอบเขตของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศอาจถูกมองข้าม ซึ่งอาจทำให้การเข้าใจประเด็นเรื่องการท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศไม่รอบด้าน และไม่เห็นขอบเขตของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศที่ชัดเจน ดังนั้น บทความนี้ซึ่งเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของงานวิจัยจึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อนำเสนอองค์ประกอบของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศ และวิเคราะห์องค์ประกอบเหล่านี้ เพื่อให้สังคมเกิดความรู้ความเข้าใจถึงองค์ประกอบและขอบเขตของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศที่ชัดเจน อันจะเป็นประโยชน์เพื่อการค้นคว้าวิจัยและการพัฒนาในอนาคต

คำสำคัญ: การท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศ, องค์ประกอบของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศ, การท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืน

Abstract

Over the past decades, ecotourism has received great interest in academic community and tourism industry due to its fundamental to the sustainable tourism development. Previous research in ecotourism and its development have been implemented through ecotourism concept and its principles. However, the knowledge to truly understand its elements and scope was overlooked; resulting in the incomplete comprehension of ecotourism dimensions. Therefore, this research-based article has an objective to introduce the “ecotourism mix” and analyze its elements in order to yield a thoroughly understanding of ecotourism dimensions. Such analysis will contribute to a better understanding of ecotourism and its benefits to the future research and development.

Key words: ecotourism, ecotourism mix, sustainable tourism

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Introduction

In recent years, ecotourism in Thailand has received significant attention from all levels including government, educational institutions, and business sectors. This is because ecotourism has been widely recognized as the fundamental to the sustainable tourism development, natural resources conservation, and community development. According to the literature, ecotourism is a nature-based tourism that helps to minimize negative impacts on the nature and socio-cultural environment, educates visitors about nature, provides economic and social benefits to local communities, and supports the protection and conservation of natural and cultural assets (Patterson, 2002; Wearing & Neil, 2009). Thailand has adopted the concept of ecotourism from Western perspectives with the purposes to conserve ecosystems and natural environment as well as to generate socio-economic benefits to local communities (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 1997). From the year 2000 onwards, the prevailing situation of global sustainable development has aroused great awareness of ecotourism among the public to take actions to achieve appropriate ecotourism development in many countries including Thailand (Sangpikul, 2008).

Due to the complicated concept of ecotourism, many people may basically understand ecotourism through ecotourism concept and its principles. Moreover, there are mis-understanding of the concept among the academics and industry practitioners. Some may understand ecotourism merely as nature tourism, adventure tourism, community tourism

or agri-tourism. Previous research also indicates that there is the mis-use of ecotourism for marketing and business purposes due to the lack of understanding ecotourism. These situations may cause an inappropriate direction of ecotourism development of the country. In addition, the knowledge to thoroughly understand its elements and scope was overlooked; resulting in the incomplete comprehension of ecotourism dimensions. Therefore, this research-based article has an objective to introduce the “ecotourism mix” and analyze its elements in order to yield a thoroughly understanding of ecotourism dimensions. Ecotourism mix is the essential elements of ecotourism that serves as the fundamental to the sustainable tourism development. It consists of the five elements: nature, education, conservation, impact, and community. These five elements (ecotourism mix) were found through an analysis of ecotourism definitions and its principles on a research project titled “Developing Good Practices for Ecotourism Tour Operators” conducted by Sangpikul (2011). The main content of this article will be based on that research. It is hoped that the value of the article will contribute to a better understanding of ecotourism mix and its benefits to the future research and development. In addition, the elements of ecotourism mix will advance the existing knowledge on ecotourism literature. The following sections will be discussed on ecotourism definitions, ecotourism mix, and its contributions.

A Review of Ecotourism Definitions

The beginning of the ecotourism mix was done through the analysis of ecotourism definitions. Recognizing the growth and contributions of ecotourism, there are a number of ecotourism definitions defined in numerous ways in related literature due to different stakeholders' points of view (e.g. tourism scholars, environmentalists, government agencies, business sector). Despite various ecotourism

definitions defined by scholars and related organizations, little effort has been made on analyzing its elements to yield a thoroughly understanding of ecotourism dimensions and its scope. Without the understanding of ecotourism elements, this may challenge us when discussing about ecotourism (e.g. what makes up ecotourism, what is a scope or boundary of ecotourism). In order to understand the definitions of ecotourism and its elements, selected ecotourism definitions were reviewed as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Description of selected ecotourism definitions based on academic scholars and related organizations

Sources	Ecotourism definitions and descriptions
Kutay (1989, p. 30)	Ecotourism is a model of development in which natural areas are planned as part of the tourism base and biological resources are clearly linked to social economic sectors.
Boo (1991, p. 4)	Ecotourism is a nature tourism that contributes to conservation, through generating funds for protected areas, creating employment opportunities for local communities, and offering environmental education.
Sirakaya et al. (1999, p.171)	Ecotourism is a new form of non-consumptive, educational and romantic tourism to relatively undisturbed and under-visited areas of immense natural beauty and cultural and historical importance for the purpose of understanding and appreciating the natural and socio-cultural history of the host destination. Ecotourism is expected to result in minimal negative impacts on the environment, while protecting and conserving the environment including its socio-culture.
Blamey (2001, p.15)	Ecotourism is nature-based, environmentally educated, and sustainable managed in terms of natural and cultural environment.

According to Table 1, there are several ecotourism definitions that many scholars and related organizations have attempted to define it in order to suit their needs and disciplines (e.g. environment, tourism, social science). This

suggests that ecotourism has been defined from a simple definition to a more comprehensive one depending on authors' background and disciplines (e.g. academics, government, and industry practitioners). Some may define it

on the motives of travelers while others may incorporate several principles into the term. The reasons behind this phenomenon could be explained as follows. **Firstly**, there is a variety of different perspectives and criteria used to distinguish ecotourism including the motivations for initiating ecotourism (e.g. conservation strategy or environmental education), the motivations of users/authors, and the scale of ecotourism development (e.g. focusing environmental or social or economic dimension) (Fennell, 2001). **Secondly**, it could be possible that the aim of ecotourism in each country (or society) can vary from one to another. This might be because ecotourism takes place in many varied environmental, social, economic, cultural and political contexts depending on each country (Fennell, 2001; Sangpikul, 2008). With these reasons, the focus of ecotourism in each country could be different, and this may affect the concept or definition of ecotourism. **Thirdly**, ecotourism has been defined in numerous ways or other related fields by various authors such as academics, government sector

or industry practitioners (Blamey, 2001; Fennell, 2001). Thus, its definitions may be more likely to be philosophical, ethical, environmental, sustainable or even tourism-oriented depending on authors' focus (Fennell, 2001). Consequently, this phenomenon **challenges** tourism scholars in several ways. For instance, which definitions should we base on?, what are the key elements of ecotourism?, what are the scope of ecotourism?. With these challenges, it raises a question for us to identify what is the **common ground** or **key elements of ecotourism**. One possible way is to review the above definitions (Table 1) and identify them into common elements as shown in Table 2.

An Identification of Ecotourism Elements

Table 2 presents the identification of ecotourism elements based on the definitions from Table 1. Various ecotourism definitions are *content analyzed* and *identified* into core elements of ecotourism.

Table 2: The identification of ecotourism elements based on its definitions

Sources of definitions (by authors)	Nature element	Education element	Conservation element	Impact element	Community element
Kutay (1989)	√	-	√	-	√
Boo (1991)	√	√	√	-	√
Sirakaya et al. (1999)	√	√	√	√	√
Blamey (2001)	√	√	√	√	√

According to Table 2, it shows that the definitions of ecotourism, defined by various sources, can be viewed from *a narrow to a broader scope* with the minimum of **3 elements** (less-structured ecotourism) up to the maximum of **5 elements** (full-structured ecotourism). Each of them is *essential* to the overall success of ecotourism development. At this point, the identification of ecotourism elements suggests that ecotourism is different from other forms of tourism because there are various components to make up ecotourism in order to make it *sustainable*. According to Table 2, the five elements are identified, namely, 1) nature element 2) education element 3) conservation element 4) impact element and 5) community element. In details, if we analyze the contribution of each element to the sustainability, it is argued that the number of the elements affects the degree of sustainability. That is *the more elements of ecotourism, the more likely it would be sustainably managed*. This is because the five elements will constitute the full development rather than three or four elements. To further explain, ecotourism is a concept of tourism development. It aims to balance the three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social and environmental components. Thus, it requires several players (elements) to achieve the sustainability. Therefore, the elements of ecotourism identified in Table 2 can well reflect the level of sustainability outcomes. According to the literature, *any ecotourism* with three elements (narrow scope) might be called “**soft ecotourism**” because they do not cover all elements of ecotourism development. Whereas *any ecotourism* with five elements may be

regarded as “**hard ecotourism**” or some scholars may call “**sustainable ecotourism**” since they cover all dimensions of ecotourism that can lead to the sustainability. **In conclusion**, in relation to the analysis of ecotourism definitions, the five elements or ecotourism mix were identified. As a part of a research project (see Sangpikul, 2011), these five elements were further analyzed against ecotourism principles and its code of conduct to examine its validity and relationship. The analysis found that both ecotourism principles and its code of conduct were under the scope of the five elements. This may regard that the five elements are the “**true ecotourism**”.

Discussion of Ecotourism Mix

After identifying the key elements of ecotourism mix, this section will be discussed on the importance of these elements that contribute to the sustainable ecotourism.

1. Nature element: It is widely accepted that ecotourism is a form of nature tourism. Ecotourism, therefore, uses natural resources as the major component. According to Table 1, it seems that all authors define ecotourism in relation to natural areas, natural environment, ecosystem, undisturbed or undeveloped areas. These areas implies something about the nature, particularly, the undisturbed/uncontaminated natural areas. This is because the focus of ecotourism is concerned with the quality of the natural environment and the exposure to an entire ecosystem for learning component (Sirikaya et al., 1999; Weaver, 2001). In ecotourism, the “**nature**” is regarded

as the basic component, and it becomes the first element identified from the literature. In general, natural areas that ecotourism occur may include national parks or relatively undisturbed areas, protected areas, wetlands, coastal and marine areas, wildlife reserves, and other areas of protected flora, fauna, and habitats (Fennell, 2003). Besides the physical environment, it is argued that travelers' enjoyment and appreciation of the nature such as wildlife, plants, landscape, and scenery are the supplements of the nature element. As ecotourism is based on the natural environment, it involves with a wide range of nature-based activities. There are a great number of nature-based activities that relate to ecotourism such as seeing wildlife, bird watching, hiking, climbing, trekking, nature education/walk, canoeing, sea kayaking, scuba or snorkel diving, cave exploring, etc. Other activities may include mountain biking, tent camping, and white water rafting. In reviewing the literature (Weaver, 2001), the activities that can affect the degree of ecotourism can be divided into 3 groups: *consumptive*, *non-consumptive* and *low consumptive activities*. The **non-consumptive activities** are those in which the organism is not affected by human interaction such as animal watching, nature photography, nature/outdoor education, and nature observation. On the opposite side, **consumptive activities** are the activities that impose certain purposefully intended impacts on the organism such as hunting or fishing. The consumptive activities are usually not recognized as eco-activities (Diamantis, 1999). As for the **low consumptive activities**, they are those activities that the organism is not affected by human interaction but,

in some ways, the activities may unintentionally impose some or little impacts on the environment such as mountain hiking/climbing/biking, nature trekking, canoeing/kayaking, scuba/snorkel diving. Following ecotourism principles, low and non-consumptive activities may be provided for tourists to experience ecotourism and natural appreciation.

Besides natural attractions, many scholars have recognized the importance of culture or associated cultural attractions (e.g. indigenous people, archeological sites) in the areas visited as a part of natural element (Blamey, 2001; Weaver, 2005). Some advocated that ecotourism is based on natural attractions that might incorporate cultural heritage component (Blamey, 2001; Weaver, 2005). They suggested that ecotourism is not only about natural history and protected areas but also about the people (and its culture) who live and have lived in these places (Diamantis, 1999; Blamey, 2001; Weaver, 2005). For instance, the inclusion of a cultural component is evident in destinations that are occupied by indigenous people in certain parts of the world such as Australia, New Zealand, South America, and northern Scandinavia (Weaver, 2005). In such situations, the boundary between nature and culture is often unclear (relatively connected) and natural ecosystems are substantially the consequence of nature-based activities (e.g. fishing, planting or hunting) undertaken by indigenous people (Hinch, 2001 cited in Weaver, 2005). Due to this fact, the cultural component associated with a particular natural area may be added to the ecotourism experience.

2. Education element: In general, learning about the nature is a **primary** concern of ecotourism (Blamey, 2001; Fennell, 2003). This argument seems to fit with what has been presented in Table 1: that is many scholars have regarded education as the important element of ecotourism. According to the literature, learning about the nature *forms* the basis of the ecotourism experience (Diamantis, 1999; Weaver, 2001). Through the learning, it can provide travelers a better understanding and respect for the natural and cultural environment of the destination areas, and thereby reduce inappropriate behaviors and negative impacts (Weaver, 2001). With a minimal impact, the quality and the nature of ecotourism destination can be maintained. Therefore, this is the major reason why academics advocated natural education as the important element of ecotourism.

Education element is a broad and subjective term, it may involve nature education, environmental learning, nature interpretation or appreciation about the natural attractions and wildlife (Weaver, 2001; Armstrong & Weiler, 2002). However, the degree of nature learning of an individual could be varied depending on low-to-high motivations and interests (Weaver, 2001). Some authors (Wight, 1993; Diamantis, 1999) argued that ecotourism should not only provide education to travelers but also to other related stakeholders (i.e. state agencies/park authorities, non-government organizations, business, and local community) to foster nature respect and sustainable use of natural resources. Another scholar, Weaver (2001) pointed out an interesting issue regarding nature education. He cited that the emphasis of ecotourism

should be on the study and/or appreciation of the resources rather than using the resources as a venue for other activities as in white-water rafting or sunbathing on the beach. This suggests that, in ecotourism frame, travelers visit ecotourism destinations to learn or appreciate the nature, while in the mass tourism, people use the destinations for tourism activities. According to Ceballos-Lascurain (1987 cited in Diamantis, 1999), education is an important factor for protecting the natural environment. He argued that if a traveler has an awareness and knowledge about the natural environment, in such way, that will convert him or her into somebody keenly involved in conservation issues. Having a conservation mind, it is expected that he or she would be likely to be a responsible traveler when visiting the tourism areas (with respect and appreciation of the nature). One important method to support learning experience is through an interpretation. Following Armstrong and Weiler (2002), interpretation is an educational activity that promotes learning and understanding between the natural environment and the visitors by delivering messages or explanation about something. In a simple word, interpretation is to make something easier to understand. It is expected that effective interpretation (performed by a tour guide) will encourage appropriate behaviors of visitors and responsible travel that minimizes the negative impacts of visitation (Diamantis, 1999; Weaver, 2001; Armstrong & Weiler, 2002).

3. Conservation element: Some scholars advocated that conservation is regarded as another primary concern of ecotourism (Tourism Authority of Thailand 1997;

Diamantis, 1999). This argument seems to be well supported by the definitions of ecotourism as presented in Table 1 that many academics have placed “conservation” as the key component of ecotourism. The reason may be explained in this way. According to Matysek and Kriwoken (2003), ecotourism is different from nature tourism in that ecotourism focuses on the quality of the natural environment such as well-preserved or protected natural areas and wildlife habitat. When concerning the quality of ecotourism destinations, there is no doubt that it should be directly involved with the conservation of those resources (Wall, 1994 cited in Diamantis, 1999). This is because conservation will help maintain, protect and enhance the quality of the ecotourism destinations from misconducts and inappropriate behaviors of related stakeholders (e.g. travelers, tourism operators, and local people). Several scholars claimed that to be qualified as the ecotourism destinations, conservation is needed to protect the natural environment and the resources of the areas (Tourism Authority of Thailand 1997; Diamantis, 1999). Another reason is that tour operators use or consume natural resources by taking the group of tourists to enjoy and experience the nature. Any trip or activity occurring at the ecotourism destinations might have certain impacts from tourists, tourism activities or vehicles. With this concern, the tour operators should take the responsibility of what they do at the ecotourism destinations by restoring, improving or maintaining the ecosystem of the areas they operate. Following this literature, it can be referred that the conservation of resources should be undertaken in the ecotourism

destinations or the areas being visited (Valentine, 1993; Wearing & Neil, 2009). With the above explanation, this may help justify why conservation is one of the essential aspects of ecotourism.

When considering the word ‘conservation’, it seems to be a broad term encompassing different approaches of conserving and protecting natural resources. To simplify this, we have to find out a more concrete or explicit term from the literature to guide what are included in the conservation. According to the literature (Smith & Wishnie, 2000 cited in Fennell, 2008), conservation may include something like the protection, maintenance, management, sustainable use, restoration and enhancement of the natural environment as well as it may cover the prevention of resource depletion, species extirpation or habitat degradation. Furthermore, conservation also covers that resources should be used, managed, and protected so that they will not be degraded and unnecessarily wasted and will be available to present and future generations (Wearing & Neil, 2009). It is also interesting to note that physical assistance (e.g. volunteers), financial or other assistances (e.g. research, donation, sponsorship) that positively contribute to the conservation of the ecotourism areas may be included as a form of conservation (Chester & Crabtree, 2002). Following the above literature, conservation activities can be made on a direct method such as actual conservation projects or indirect approach such as funding or sponsorship, and the conservation approaches may cover a wide range of activities such as restoring, improving, enhancing or maintaining the

quality or surrounding environment of the natural resources.

4. Impact element: In order to support the conservation, the impact element should be involved in order to reduce the negative impacts from visitors' behaviors and tour operations (Haysmith, 1995 cited in Diamantis, 1999). This is why several scholars, as presented in Table 1, have recognized "impact" as one of the ecotourism features (Buckley, 1994). Even in the responsible tourism, Hetzer (1997 cited in Fennell, 2003) identified that responsible tourism is needed to have four fundamental pillars, one of them is the minimum impacts to the environment and host community; suggesting the role of impact consideration. Other scholars have advocated the role of impact toward ecotourism in several perspectives. Ziffer (1989), for example, addressed that ecotourism is not only concerned with the well-being of natural resources conservation and local economy, but is also involved with maintaining a minimum impact on the resources base. Whilst Figgis (1993 cited in Diamantis, 1999) pointed out that when visiting ecotourism destinations, damage and deterioration of the environment should be avoided. Sirakaya et al. (1999) further added that ecotourism is expected to result in minimal negative impacts on the environment. Interestingly, Wallace and Pierce (1996) argued that impact consideration is one of the principles that qualify as true ecotourism.

When discussing about the impact, it often refers to "*personal impact*" resulting from "*tourists*". Thus, the tourists play an important role toward the degree of making impacts to

the environment or the areas visited. According to Swarbrooke (1998), sustainable tourism (including ecotourism) cannot be achieved by regulating or lecturing tourists. Instead, it should be developed in a form which gives tourists a "feel good experience" reflecting from social and environmental values. This suggests that tourists should be motivated to feel "willing" or "cooperative" to reduce their personal impacts to the environment. Swarbrooke further suggested that tourists have their basic responsibilities in tourism or when traveling such as the responsibilities for obeying local laws and regulations, not deliberately harming the local physical environment, minimizing the use of scarce local resources, and protecting the natural wildlife and environment. Therefore, the concern of impact could be regarded as the part of tourists' responsibilities. When visiting ecotourism destination with cultural associated attraction, Weaver (2001) urged that travelers should be respectful to their impact upon the physical and cultural environment of the destination. He further added that ecotourism should be coherent with the notion of sustainable tourism by adhering to the *carrying capacity* of the destination, and being acceptable to, and supportive of, host community. This is an interesting point to consider the impacts in relation to the local community. Another view to reduce the personal impact is to take a small group of people with a minimum impact on the physical, social and cultural environment (Wearing & Neil, 2009).

5. Community element: One of the essential elements of ecotourism is the improvement of local community. Generally, it

is accepted that the fundamental of sustainable tourism is concerned with the local tourism (community). Following the analysis of ecotourism definitions, it can be referred that ecotourism should involve local community as a key player in the sustainable development. There are several reasons behind this. For instance, when local people in a particular area have a better quality of life generated by ecotourism activities (e.g. tourists' spending, local employment), it is expected that they would view ecotourism as an important asset that should be taken care of and protected as well as may generate a feeling of ownership of the areas (their community). In such belief, local people would take an active role to participate in ecotourism related-activities. As long as they take a good care of their areas including natural and cultural attractions, this would be regarded as the key factor contributing to the success of ecotourism development in the long term. The idea of local involvement with ecotourism is like a *down-top* tourism development (local control-oriented), which is believed to yield more sustainable than the *top-down* type (state control-oriented).

In order to get the local people involved with ecotourism, we need to sustainably develop them in terms of economic, social, and environment dimensions. Before discussing this, it should be first to make clear about a word "local community". *What does it mean for the local community* in terms of ecotourism? According to the literature, **local community refers to local people or residents who live in or close to ecotourism destination where ecotourism is based on** (Buckley, 1994). Thus, the development of local community should be

aimed at those residents living in that area (or nearby). Now we will explain how ecotourism relates to local community and improve their life. The relationship can be explained in many ways. We will start with the *economic and environmental dimensions*. According to the literature, some experts argue that the involvement of local community in ecotourism is important because the local people play an important role in protecting and conserving natural resources in their areas (Weaver, 1999). Following a United Nations report, local people are likely to protect natural resources when they receive some benefits from tourism. Similarly, the Biodiversity Conservation Network reported that if local communities receive sufficient benefits from an enterprise (e.g. tour companies) that depends on biodiversity in the natural surrounding, then they will act to protect that biodiversity (eco-destinations). Furthermore, ecotourism income can minimize dependence on certain activities that exploit natural resources such as commercial agriculture, logging, and hunting (Langholz, 1999). The study of Stronza and Gordillo (2008) may support the above argument in that ecotourism can prevent local residents from exploiting natural resources. According to Stronza and Gordillo's study in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, the study reported that ecotourism was a catalyst for positive changes in the communities. For example, it revealed that former hunters now change the jobs to be birding and wildlife guides, fishermen now do a living by driving tour boats, and those who were unemployed now sell handicrafts to tourists. Following the above literature, it suggests that ecotourism can improve locals' living in a

certain way, and they could be a good reflection of the socio-economic and environmental development in a particular community.

Another point regarding community participation and involvement, Stronza and Gordillo (2008) has pointed out that the conservation of ecotourism destinations should come through participation in ownership and management of local residents rather than through economic benefits alone. Because participation can help build skills in leadership and strengthen local institutions whereas also ensuring that residents can make economic benefits into a broader goal. In a simple word, it could say that while local employment and other economic benefits may lead to the local economy, participation in ownership and management of ecotourism activities or related projects may lead to new learning and greater local cohesion (socio-development).

In addition to the economic and environmental perspective, ecotourism may contribute to the socio-cultural benefits by improving intercultural appreciation and understanding between host community and travelers (McNeely, Thorsell, Ceballos-Lascurain, 1991 cited in Ross & Wall, 1999). For instance, when travelers visit a village, they may have a change to meet, interact or learn something from the locals (e.g. culture, ways of life, food, performance), and even buy something as a souvenir. Certainly, ecotourism not only generates local economy, but it may instill a sense of local pride to villagers, and may promote or strengthen cultural heritage awareness among the local residents. In order to support socio-cultural benefits, it is interesting in what

Ziffer (1989) addressed about the role of travelers to the local community. He urged that, when visiting eco-destinations, travelers or eco-tourists may contribute to the areas visited through labor or financial ways that can benefit the conservation of the site and economic well-being of the local residents. Following Ziffer, it suggests that travelers are an important player to the development of local community in some ways if they wish. For example, they can help the community in some projects such as being a volunteer or donate some money in wildlife conservation project, forestry planting, and school project or buy local products. This example could be another way to promote mutual understanding and social relationship between travelers and hosts. More importantly, it can promote a positive side of ecotourism on local residents' view.

5. Contributions of Ecotourism Mix

This section will address the contributions of the ecotourism mix. Based on the analysis of ecotourism mix and previous research's findings (see Sangpikul 2010; 2011), the ecotourism mix contributes to the following knowledge.

5.1 Ecotourism definition: *Firstly*, the ecotourism mix helps us to better understand the key elements of ecotourism and its scope. Since ecotourism mix consists of the five key elements, these elements are helpful in defining another perspective of ecotourism definition. This modified definition may be further used for academic purpose or tourism development. Through the combination of the five elements

of ecotourism mix, another definition of ecotourism (modified version) may be defined that **ecotourism is a responsible travel to uncontaminated natural areas with the objectives to enjoy and experience natural attractions and associated cultural components of the areas. With the purposes to enhance the sustainability, ecotourism involves related stakeholders to foster natural learning, reduce impacts, promote conservation and develop local community.**

For future reference in Thai context, a modification of ecotourism definition may be given. การท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศ หมายถึง การเดินทางท่องเที่ยวอย่างมีความรับผิดชอบต่อแหล่งท่องเที่ยวธรรมชาติที่ยังไม่ถูกคุกคามหรือเปลี่ยนแปลงเพื่อความเพลิดเพลินและสัมผัสประสบการณ์กับสิ่งดึงดูดใจทางธรรมชาติ รวมทั้งวัฒนธรรมท้องถิ่นในพื้นที่ ทั้งนี้เพื่อมุ่งไปสู่เป้าหมายของความยั่งยืน การท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศจำเป็นต้องอาศัยผู้ที่เกี่ยวข้องเพื่อช่วยกันส่งเสริมการเรียนรู้สภาพแวดล้อมธรรมชาติ ลดผลกระทบที่เกิดขึ้น สนับสนุนการอนุรักษ์ทรัพยากร และพัฒนาชุมชนท้องถิ่นในแหล่งท่องเที่ยว

5.2 Ecotourism research: *Secondly*, the ecotourism mix provides a guideline or framework for conducting future research by giving a scope of ecotourism within the areas of the five elements. As there is no universally accepted ecotourism definition in international context. This may challenge tourism researchers/scholars to determine the scope and boundary of ecotourism when conducting their research. However, given the contribution of the ecotourism mix, its five elements may assist tourism researchers/scholars in determining the scope of their future ecotourism research. They may

conduct their research by referring or focusing on one of the ecotourism mix.

5.3 Ecotourism development:

Thirdly, since ecotourism mix provides a clearer picture and a boundary of ecotourism, it therefore helps related parties on the issue of ecotourism development. The five elements of ecotourism mix provide a framework's development on the five areas: 1) protected natural areas, education enhancement, conservation of natural resources, tourism impact and local community's involvement. Related parties or stakeholders may aim to develop ecotourism in their communities through one or more of these elements. In fact, ecotourism mix implies that whenever ecotourism is developed, all of the five elements should be incorporated in such development. For instance, if villagers want to promote ecotourism in their communities, the five elements of ecotourism mix should be considered or undertaken in order to induce the sustainable ecotourism in the communities.

5.4 Ecotourism good practice: *Finally*,

the ecotourism mix contributes to the further development of ecotourism good practice for a business sector, particularly the ecotourism tour operators. The good practice is generally recognized as one of the quality control mechanisms in the tourism industry (Weaver, 2001). It may be developed by setting the five elements of ecotourism mix as the main criteria for the ecotourism good practice for tour operators (see Sangpikul, 2010). In addition, the emergence of the ecotourism mix may be further developed as ecotourism standard to evaluate or judge a real ecotourism tour

operator (see Sangpikul, 2011). Ecotourism is a big umbrella (big brother) of green tourism and responsible tourism (Patterson, 2002). Tour operators who implement the ecotourism mix in their business may be regarded as the green or responsible business as well.

In conclusion, this article has introduced the ecotourism mix consisting of the five elements (nature, education, conservation,

impact and community). The analysis of ecotourism mix contributes to a better understanding of ecotourism dimensions. The application of ecotourism mix and its elements may be helpful for related parties (e.g. scholars, government sector, industry and local communities) to implement one or more of them for the future research and ecotourism development.

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