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Knowledge of Sustainable Tourism and Environmental Awareness: Luang Prabang, Laos PDR

การท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืนและความตระหนักรู้ด้านสิ่งแวดล้อม: หลวงพระบาง สาธารณรัฐประชาธิปไตยประชาชนลาว

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บทคัดย่อ

การท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืนมีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องโดยตรงต่อการจัดการทางเศรษฐกิจ สังคมและสิ่งแวดล้อมทั้งปัจจุบันและในอนาคต การท่องเที่ยวเมืองหลวงพระบางมีรากเหง้ามาจากความมั่งคั่งของสถานที่ท่องเที่ยวทางธรรมชาติ และจากการเจริญเติบโตนี้มีผลกระทบเชิงบวกต่อผู้ประกอบการท่องเที่ยวในท้องถิ่น แต่ในทางกลับกัน หากการพัฒนาขาดความคุมการจัดการที่ดีจากกิจกรรมทางการท่องเที่ยว อาจส่งผลกระทบต่อความมั่งคั่งและเอกลักษณ์ของเมือง วัตถุประสงค์ของการศึกษาค้นคว้าครั้งนี้เพื่อเป็นการศึกษาระดับความตระหนักรู้ด้านสิ่งแวดล้อมกับการท่องเที่ยวของผู้ประกอบการการท่องเที่ยวขนาดเล็กในท้องถิ่น นอกจากนี้การวิจัยยังมุ่งตรวจสอบการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียในท้องถิ่นทางด้านความตระหนักรู้ถึงผลกระทบด้านสิ่งแวดล้อมและการท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืน โดยใช้วิธีการ

สัมภาษณ์เชิงโครงสร้างจากผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียทางการท่องเที่ยว จำนวน 44 กลุ่ม การวิจัย พบว่า ผู้ประกอบการขนาดเล็กมีการจัดการ ความตระหนักและใส่ใจสิ่งแวดล้อม ผู้ประกอบการส่วนใหญ่ มีความตระหนักด้านสิ่งแวดล้อมเนื่องจากการที่หลวงพระบางเป็นเมืองมรดกโลก และอยู่ในการทำกับ ดูแลโดย UNESCO ผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่า ผู้ประกอบการโรงแรมหลายแห่งมีการจัดการและ ริเริ่มโครงการความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม เพื่อเป้าหมายการจัดการสิ่งแวดล้อม อย่างยั่งยืน อย่างไรก็ตาม ปัญหาหลักของหลวงพระบาง คือ การแยกขยะ มีจุดอ่อนด้านการรณรงค์ ส่งเสริมจากภาครัฐ ผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียทางการท่องเที่ยวเห็นว่า การจัดทำคู่มือให้ความรู้เกี่ยวกับ ความใส่ใจและตระหนักด้านสิ่งแวดล้อมมีประโยชน์และมีผลกดันในระดับนโยบายภาครัฐต่อไป

คำสำคัญ: การท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืน ผลกระทบด้านสิ่งแวดล้อม การถ่ายทอดเทคโนโลยี การมีส่วนร่วมทางการท่องเที่ยว ความตระหนัก

Abstract

Sustainable tourism takes full account of current and future economic, social and environmental impacts. Luang Prabang's tourism progress is rooted in its natural and man-made beauty. This abundance has a positive economic impact on local businesses providing support services to the increasing number of visitors. On the other hand, the uncontrolled development from tourism activity threatens the unique atmosphere of Luang Prabang. The purpose of this study is to provide environmental tourism knowledge for tourism entrepreneurs by creating an environmental tourism booklet. Moreover, the research aims to investigate the tourism stakeholder participation in sustainable tourism and environmental tourism impacts in Luang Prabang. A semi-structured interview method was used to collect information from 44 tourism stakeholders comprising tourist entrepreneurs and local authorities, tourism boards, local communities and tourists. The research found that small establishments could implement the simple aspects of environmental awareness. Most entrepreneurs were concerned about environmental awareness because Luang Prabang is a World Heritage City under the management of UNESCO. The results also showed that some luxury hotels created a Corporate Social Responsibility Program (CSR) to enhance a sustainable environmental goal. However, the main problems relating to the environment were separating waste and reducing plastics. There was a lack of environmental campaigns from the governmental sector. The booklet distribution was useful and will raise environmental awareness among tourism entrepreneurs. The governmental sector was a significant policy-maker that can contribute to the environmental protection

cycle of green enterprises by means of providing facilities, funds, knowledge transfer, and human resource management

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Environmental Impact, Technology Transfer, Tourism Involvement, Awareness

Introduction

Tourism destination image refers to the perception of a person of the destination (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991: 10, cited in Sirichote, 2014: 56). Destination image in terms of person's perception includes the natural resources and culture, infrastructure, atmosphere, and sea sand sun.

Luang Prabang is one of the oldest cities in Laos. It was established 1200 years ago and for close to 800 hundred years was the capital city of Lao Lane Xang until the capital was moved to Vientiane in 1560. Throughout its long history, Luang Prabang has been known by many different names such as Muang swa, Muang xieng dong, and Muang xieng thong.

After Fagnum (Former King of Laos) brought the Prabang Buddha Image, the sacred Buddha respected by the local people, for worship in this city the name was changed to Luang Prabang.

The ancient Laotian mix with colonial style houses and the surround environment result in the whole population being very proud of its reputation. Luang Prabang, a town of 33,000 inhabitants, was inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage list in December of 1995 on the basis of three criteria deemed to be of outstanding universal value; nature and culture links, juxtaposition of Lao and French urban pattern, and fusion of traditional Lao and late-19th and early-20th century French architecture.



Figure 1 Map of Laos PDR

The number of tourist arrivals to Laos increased constantly with an average growth rate of 19% between 1993 to 2013. However, the number of visitor arrivals decreased slightly from 737,208 in 2000 to 673,823 in 2001, and declined from 735,662 in 2002 to 636,361 in 2003. The main factors which influenced the decrease were the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in the United States and the spread of the SARS epidemic in Asia in the first quarter of 2003. Nevertheless, tourism recovered again in 2004 to 2012. In addition the number of tourist arrivals continued increasing in 2013, which reached 3,779,000 tourist arrivals and generated a total of 595 million US dollars (Laos, Tourism Development Department, 2013).

Common to many regions and countries in the process of development, Luang Prabang’s economic progress is rooted in its natural and man-made beauty, which has enabled a new tourism industry to flourish as demonstrated by an increase of annual visits. This influx has had a positive economic impact on local businesses that provide support services to the increasing number of visitors. However, the

possibility of uncontrolled urban development resulting from substantial tourism activity threatens the unique atmosphere of Luang Prabang. Such development could potentially threaten Luang Prabang’s authenticity, integrity, and economic base in the near future.

Therefore, this study raises the research questions about sustainable tourism in Luang Prabang: 1) Do local communities benefit directly from tourism activity and are they indirectly responsible for the environment, in terms of income and preservation?, 2) To what level of participation is the stakeholder responsible for sustainable tourism awareness and environmental protection? and 3) How much does the local tourist entrepreneur benefit from knowledge transferred from the booklet?

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to contribute environmental tourism knowledge to tourism entrepreneurs. Moreover, the research aims to investigate the tourism stakeholder participation in sustainable tourism and environmental tourism impacts in Luang Prabang. A conceptual framework of research is shown in Figure 2.

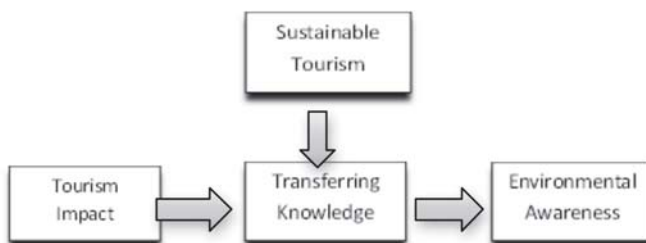


Figure 2 Conceptual Framework of Research

Sustainable Tourism and Stakeholder Involvement

According to **Marketing Tourism More Sustainable- a Guide for Policy Makers** (2005: 11), sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability. Sustainable tourism takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities. Alternative tourism (Weaver, 1991: 414, 1995: 593, cited in Harn and Minca, 2014: 98), in trend is an idea of tourism that considers ethics, morals, and responsibility including consumer and corporate decisions. Responsible tourism is another type of sustainable tourism, which is often related to ideas of environment, social responsibility, local community, and also community traditions. Responsible tourism and community-based tourism (CBT) are also mentioned in the new forms of alternative tourism, where research has suggested that it is derived from tourist demands for a holiday that fulfils the satisfaction of social needs and contact with other people and self-realization through creative activities, knowledge and exploration. (Krippendorf, 1987: 105, cited in Harn and Minca, 2014: 98).

The concept of stakeholders and/or involvement becomes more important when considering tourism. The community structure of a destination is perceived as a community network (Cooper, Scott, and Baggio, 2009: 35). The tourism stakeholders are comprised of the local community, the community leader, government and private sectors, and also NGOs. All these parties occupy the centre of a relationship network and assume essential roles in involvement in terms of management of the destination. Stakeholder collaboration represents a widely accepted approach to solving the problems and few shared common goals between among the many stakeholders in tourism development.

Obviously, sustainable development should focus on the relationship between ethics and the principles of quality and durability. Quality means satisfying customer expectations and maintaining a profitable economic activity by paying the actors of production in a fair manner. These two objectives are inconceivable without an ethical involvement of people engaged in the tourism process. The development and implementation of sustainable tourism policies must be based on a number of principles and approaches that can be applied universally. Moreover, quality in terms of sustainable tourism focuses on three pillars, quality of environment, tourist activities and experiences, and quality of life in communities

by giving priority and benefits to local communities as well as concern about natural resources and environment. (Ponanake, 2012: 160)

Environmental Tourism Impacts

Tourism activities in Laos have both positively and negatively affected the natural resources. According to the Laos Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MAF) (2005: 3), forest resources also play a vital role in national development. Laos's forests generated national capital, but as a result also generated massive forest destruction and the extinction of many wild species. However, after the first national forestry conference held in 1989, the forestry policy direction shifted to biological diversity preservation. The conference also agreed on steps to be taken to reverse deforestation and resolved that forest cover should return to 70% by the year 2020.

The tourism environment has been defined as an environment in which people can be involve in tourism activities, such as education and knowledge, local community experiences, and physical enjoyment. It also includes natural, social and economic environments as well as technological conditions. L. Zhong et al (2011: 2973) has studied the impact of tourism on the environment. They divided tourism environment into two categories; narrow and broad. The narrow type emphasizes the natural ecological

environment, whereas the broad is considered to include the economic environment as a component or system of the tourism environment. Tourism development can also enhance and consolidate local resident's pride, promote communication with the outside world, and help develop understanding of a foreign culture. Interestingly, green productivity enhances the efficiency of tourism activities. It is a technique, tool and process to implement productivity, increase quality of life, and reduce environmental impact (Charoenkijjarukorn, 2013: 191).

Roth (1992: 12), a pioneer of environmental literacy, defined environmental knowledge as the combination of all cognitive understanding known in the environment and the problems associated with it (Varisli, 2009: 9). Environmental knowledge should also be combined with abstract and concrete knowledge of the natural and ecosystem that includes the understanding of its relationships (Hamalainen, 2012: 382). Abstract knowledge concerns issues of the environment where the causes and the solution to a problem are identified, for example the training and transfer of environmental knowledge to leaders and local communities on environmental impacts from tourism. Concrete knowledge is more related to behavioral knowledge, which looks at benefits and actions. Tourism environment knowledge encourages basic understanding and

encourages individuals to gain a variety of experiences, increased awareness of their surroundings and develop a positive attitude towards the environment (Daniel, Nadeson, and Shafiee, 2007: 4). Lastly, it is a significant mechanism for the sustainability of tourism development.

Technological Transfer in Tourism

Sustainable tourism means to concentrate on living conditions, maintenance, and development for future generations. Therefore, the challenge is to assess the tourism resources and develop competitive, quality tourism. Consequently, technology transfer is important for the improvement of equity favourable to the population from new tourist destinations, particularly in developing countries, and LDCs (Acting for Life, 2011: 10). According to the United Nations (1992: 2), states should cooperate to strengthen endogenous capacity building for sustainable development by improving scientific understanding through exchanges of scientific and technological knowledge, and by enhancing the development, adaptation, diffusion and transfer of technologies, including new and innovative technologies. In terms of tourism marketing, technology and innovation play a crucial role in higher quality of products and competitiveness. UNWTO (1999: 3), Clayton and Criscuolo (2002: 62) mentioned that technology from the modern information society, particularly the internet, has bought

four key changes that apply equally to the tourism sector, which are; the ability to turn ideas into marketable innovation for a wide range of customers, increase speed to market and access to new product offerings via the internet, change processes, share information within and between organisations, and shift the balance of power between suppliers and customers due to the increased availability of information. However, Kirk and Pind (1998: 207) argued that the use of technology in the field of hospitality is not widespread compared with many other industries. The gap between management's business needs and technology understanding, and hospitality tourism buyers being uncertain about the effectiveness of investments in technology are crucial factors of unsuccessful utilisation.

According to Acting for Life (2011: 27), technology transfer can help the tourism sector, and in particular the local population and small business through differential tools, such as marketing, management, design, production, dissemination and quality range. However, technology transfer is not only an abstract training method, it is also a practical way to permanently solve actual problems inherent to the tourism sector. International tourism is an activity involving advanced technology that represents a challenge for developing countries as to how they can adapt to market evolutions and to the rising importance of new technologies (Sihabutr, 2012:

50). For example, in order for those countries to let their recently built hotels benefit from the effects of essential economic channels, they settle franchise agreements with international hotel chains, which in return provide their brands, their technology and their marketing networks. In terms of management, these contracts provide an international experience to the newly founded hotel complexes, but they also represent a risk for developing countries in the sense that it puts a certain pressure on their occupancy rates.

Research Methodology

To mitigate the environmental impacts of tourist activity, the development of programmes to raise awareness of environmental problems and education is necessary. The results will demonstrate the level of awareness of environmental impacts. An educational booklet is created to combat the degradation of the environment. The Programme is developed to provide the stakeholders concerned as a priority with an appropriate tool to transfer the indispensable basic information for management of the environment. Parallel to these goals, the

programme aims to make the local community residing in the targeted areas benefit directly and indirectly from environmentally responsible tourism activity, in terms of both income and preservation of their natural surroundings. Consequently, the booklet programme can contribute to the reduction of poverty by firstly improving the residents' hygiene conditions and secondly reinforcing the direct economic impact of tourism.

The booklet was developed in both English and Laotian languages. It represents a tool for the identification of, and solution to, environmental problems. It is based on the principle that enterprises can undertake the activities in the booklet, according to their abilities, on an on-going basis. The main concept of this educational booklet is based on "Do & Don't" guidelines, the simple main steps being reduce, re-use and recycle, and the use of simple, easy and short sentences. There are 5 main themes in the booklet; keeping the environment clean, reducing the rubbish, protecting wildlife, waste treatment, green kitchen, and saving our environment



Figure 3 Educational Booklet "Do and Don't"

A semi-structured interview method was used to collect 44 tourism stakeholders. The main participants were tourist SMEs and MSEs (Micro Small Enterprises) such as: hospitality enterprises, food and beverage enterprises, travel agents, suppliers, local authorities, tourism boards, local communities and tourists themselves. A qualitative method of dissemination is used to reach the goal of the study. It relied on observing entrepreneurs, which can be used to gather information by taking part along with the subject being studied, and by being a tourist or customer. Explaining the brochure was the first process to introduce and understand the brochure at the sites. Our purpose was to explain environmental protection and management to the target group. Moreover, typically half an hour interviews, involved asking for opinions from both private and governmental sectors, such as tourist boards, municipalities and other local authorities.

A focus group was also organised on-site. The aim of this method is to listen and note the results from participants in the discussion. Bringing a focus group of people together rather than talking one-to-one is the way to an efficient result (Two-way Communication and Brain-Storming). We proposed organising a workshop to explain our study. The target group comprised from twenty to thirty participants from the tourism sectors at those sites. The focus group worked to ensure that our team

had a role in guiding (facilitating) the meetings, that everyone participated in the discussion and that all aspects of the topic were covered. After the data was gathered from observations, interviews and the focus group, it was analysed for each site. Lastly, notes were written up and results analysed with an added conclusion, recommendations and future programme of activities.

Results

The booklet distribution in Luang Prabang involved 44 enterprises. Interviews were carried out with hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and tour operators in the tourist centre of Luang Prabang. The research found that small establishments can implement the simple ways of environmental awareness such as save water, separate plastic bottles and collect to sell and recycle, use local materials (wood) to decorate and design, start to use energy-saving lights in guestrooms, provide glasses and glass bottles in guestrooms instead of plastic bottles, provide drinking water in gallon sizes instead of small bottles. The entrepreneurs commented that the main environmental wastes in Luang Prabang were natural wastes; therefore, it is not difficult to treat these wastes in the soil. A hotel had just recently opened along the river front; therefore, it was important for it to be aware of and concerned about the quality of the environment, which directly affected its business. The hotel tried to preserve its

surrounding landscape by maintaining a garden and keeping existing trees. Furthermore, the hotel also supported the concept of the booklet by encouraging and facilitating the establishment of an environmental campaign.

The results showed that some luxury hotels had created a Corporate Social Responsibility Program (CSR) to enhance sustainable environmental goals. For example, to green communities they established an initiative to plant 2000 trees per hotel property over the next 10 years, from 2007 to 2016. This was to promote the company's efforts in raising awareness for climate change, and also to create a three-phase community support initiative to enhance the Group's ability to be an agent of social and economic development through its associates, engagements, and operations and as a conservation resource. In addition, the program explores efficiency initiatives with the aim of reducing consumption of energy and water as well as waste production at the hotel group. For the next project, the hotel plans to install a solar cell system to save energy and the hotel budget. The hotel management team also suggested a way to deal with the increase in rubbish in the town, by educating the local people to be aware of the environment and make them feel that Luang Prabang town belongs to them.

However, the main environment problems were the separation of waste and reducing

plastics. People did not separate types of rubbish, but collected all for the municipality, while some local people still throw waste into the Namkhan River. Concerning this issue, the responsible officials should establish rules or instigate campaigns to solve this problem. There was a lack of environmental campaigns from the governmental sector. Entrepreneurs and local people also commented about the rubbish bins in the public areas. They want the local authority to arrange enough rubbish bins in the public areas, especially in the main tourist places that rubbish also causes smells which annoy local people and tourists. Moreover, there are no separate bins provided for different types of rubbish in Luang Prabang.

Most hotels in Luang Prabang have never participated in environmental programmes. Entrepreneurs said that this booklet distribution was useful and encouraged people to be more concerned about the environment. Entrepreneurs were interested in our environmental program, and felt that it was a useful booklet for people in Luang Prabang. People realised that rubbish had increased since Luang Prabang became a World Heritage City in 1995. During the focus group, government sectors stated that Luang Prabang lacked management competence in environmental protection such as waste separation and treatment. However, since Luang Prabang was the World Heritage City, all activities, whether construction, commercial

or tourist activities must be approved by UNESCO through Maison du Patrimoine. Private tourism sectors also suggested that the government should establish rules and organize campaigns to encourage local people to be more aware of environmental sustainability.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations for Future Research

The study of Luang Prabang found that most entrepreneurs have environmental awareness due to the fact that Luang Prabang is a World Heritage City under the management of UNESCO. Because of this attitude, attention can be directed to enhance and support Luang Prabang City in terms of environmental protection. Furthermore, the people realised that some steps of environmental protection can be taken to save cost in the long term, for example, reducing and recycling of wastes, and changing to use energy-saving light bulbs to save costs. However, the volume of waste from both tourists and local people that cannot decompose (polystyrenes) or take time to decompose (plastics) has increased. There is no strong management or good action plan to control this problem, even though the city is supported by UNESCO relative to conservation and development. The interview survey found that the disadvantage of the Urban Development Administration Authority (UDAA)'s management

is its inability to manage and treat the waste. For example; there is no central waste water treatment system, the capacity to collecting the garbage in public areas is still low (especially in tourist areas) and not enough provision for garbage collection. However, the latter issue has been solved by the call for bids to fulfil this need.

Interestingly, it was found that the knowledge level of local people about environmental awareness was quite low. One of the significant contributing factors was the variety of tribes of local people, such as hill tribes who become sellers at the night market. Most of them have low level of education and environmental knowledge. In Laos, there are no regulations for business sectors in the municipality to control and protect the environment, such as installing a septic tank system composed of a septic tank, a filter tank and a grease trap in hotels and restaurants. As a result, it will effect to eco-system in the long run. Entrepreneurs suggested that this booklet distribution was useful and would raise environmental awareness. They suggested the involved sectors, especially the government participate more actively to promote and educate this awareness.

In order to be a "Green Enterprise", the first step is to "Reduce and Re-use" by reducing water and energy consumption and indirectly leading to a reduction in the quantity

of rubbish. Besides, Re-use is a procedure that can be introduced immediately and will also save the cost of making alternative arrangements. Recycling is an important element in making the enterprise completely a “Green Enterprise”. It adds value and helps to change people’s behaviour from abandoning rubbish to collecting it for profit.

In particular, to eliminate waste completely, the concepts should be widened to include all activities of an enterprise, to eliminate all toxic emissions from production sites, to change gradually to renewable energies, and to address the priority of waste recycling.

The governmental sector is a significant policy-maker that can contribute to the environmental protection cycle of Green Enterprises by means of providing, for example, facilities, funds, knowledge transfer and human resource management. There are also professional bodies and NGOs that also support coherent policy and management to implement the “Green Enterprise” approach.

The proposed future actions of the research could be training in a trainer programme on environmental management for local tourism operators. These programmes would provide basic technical training for employees in the management of environmental protection and the more specialised training for persons in charge of the tourist and hotel companies in the various zones selected in order to build

capacity. Moreover, a pilot programme for enhancement of environmental management may be initiated and to include discussions with the local enterprises about introducing an environmental awareness programme in their business, and to select enterprises for the pilot programme. Organising technical training programmes for employees as well as managers would also be a significant contribution to existing environmental management programmes in selected enterprises. In addition, creating a local Environmental Protection Charter for better promotion and marketing to introduce an environmental awareness programme concerned with promotional and market issues to meet the market competition by discussing and agreeing with the local stakeholders. Recommending, through training providers, specific workshops is also important to encourage and enable local communities to launch a local Environmental Protection Charter.

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