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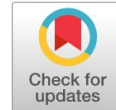


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Published online: 17 October 2015

To cite this article: Pathumporn, J., & Nakapaksin, S. (2015). Participatory action research model for sustainable community based tourism development. *International Journal of Business and Administrative Studies*, 1(3), 89-93.

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.20469/ijbas.10002-3>

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PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Keywords:

Participatory Action Research
Community-Based Tourism
Sustainable
Tourism
Tourism Development

Abstract. This research aims to develop sustainable community-based tourism by adapting the participatory action research model or PAR model for a case study of Ubolrat district, Khon Kaen province, Thailand. The PAR model in this study consists of three circles: 1) the investigation of problem finding and the analysis of tourism capacities; 2) the policy development and practising of community-based tourism at the site, and 3) evaluating sustainable tourism development and plan to revise. The tourism development application in each circle of the PAR model is based on the research findings covering 68 villages from questionnaires, site surveys, in-depth interviews, and seven-time brainstorming with key policy-makers at the district and provincial levels.

Received: 10 July 2015

Accepted: 10 September 2015

Published: 17 October 2015

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays tourism development is concerned with sustainability and positive impacts on local communities. Though, realistically tourism implementation is difficult and tourism policy planners should emphasize their significant goals. According to the Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals contributed by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in Madrid, Spain (UNWTO, 2015) as well as the growth of Thailand's tourism industry, this research aimed to analyze threats to tourism sustainability and their solutions amid a case study pertaining to Ubolrat district, Khon Kaen province, Thailand. Ubolrat district is an important area of Khon Kaen province which is in the north-eastern part of Thailand.

Also, it is a well-known tourism destination boasting water-sports, a golf course, national parks and traditional culture. However, in the previous decade, the tourism situation in this area has been declining continuously and has created cumulated conflicts between the key stakeholders. Therefore, this research was focused on the finding of possible solutions for the current tourism situation and ways to sustain the benefits for improving local communities' quality of life.

In order to achieve the goals, the appropriate research method was a participatory action research which began with the analysis of the real problems by engaging all the key stakeholders into the whole research process in addition to problem-solving. The success of this research was also applied as one of the sust-

ainable tourism development models for similar community-based tourism destinations in the provincial context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Tourism

Due to the growth of mass tourism and the convenience of travel and information reach, many destinations have been developed and destroyed by tourists and tourism managers. Mowforth and Munt (2009) suggested that to create sustainability in tourism, managers should be concerned with the criteria of participation by locals, should aid conservation, culture, society, environment, economy and education. In the Asia-Pacific context, cultural tourism and ecotourism were represented.

At the same time that tourism was introduced to tourists, all tourism businesses and services were established and expanded uncontrollably. Especially in Thailand, Harris, Griffin and Williams (2003) mentioned that the impacts of mass tourism were disproportionate to construction and infrastructure as well as the promotion of over-consumption of local resources gave rise to spoilt destinations. Hence, to enhance sustainability in tourism, it is necessary to ensure that tourism development plans balance economic goals and conservation goals at the same time (Hall & Lew, 1998; UNWTO, 2015).

Community-Based Tourism

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Community-based tourism in Thailand was promoted as a tool to sustain tourism resources and increase local residents quality of life (CBT-Institute, 2013). Meanwhile, Okazaki (2008) mentioned that the concept of community-based tourism concerns not only tourism sustainability but also community participation. He defined that community participation should provide the sharing of knowledge and opportunities of self-development by involving all stakeholders, such as local government officials, local citizens, architects, developers, business people, and planners, in the decision-making process. Consequently, to use community-based tourism to fulfill the goal of tourism sustainability, Pathumporn (2012) suggested that tourism planners should emphasize on 1) people: all key stakeholders need to be engaged in the tourism implementation; 2) process: the tourism implementation plan and process need to be based on the key stakeholders objectives and requirements; and 3) participation: all key stakeholders need to take part from the planning level and participate as a network for sustainable tourism development.

Green et al. (2003) defined the term “participatory research” as the systematic collection of data for analyzing and practicing for changes and developments. Meanwhile, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) mentioned that a participatory action research is a Philosophy of social research focusing on community development, social change and human rights in the study area. They also stated that other terms relating to this method could be called “shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems or an orientation towards community action”, which consists of many spirals or circles in the study starting from: planning a change; acting and observing the process and consequences of the change; reflecting on these processes and consequences; replanning; acting and observing again; reflecting again, and so on. Kindon, Pain and Kesby (2007) also argued that the participatory data analysis varies and is dependent on the situation and the negotiated process. Similarly, Capriello (2012) mentioned that “researchers need to focus on observing reality and merely recognizing the causes of failure in destinations’ alliances to playing an active role in identifying concrete actions that would facilitate collaboration between stakeholders”.

Participatory Action Research

FIGURE 1
Location of the Study Area



Source: Khon Kaen Provincial Office (2015)

METHODOLOGY

Data Sources and Collection

Important data were investigated from both qualitative and quantitative tools and applied to the research results for tourism implementation in each circle by adapting the concept of the PAR Model (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005 and Kindon et al., 2007) which was divided into four steps for each circle: planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

The PAR model of this study consists of three circles: 1) the investigation of problem finding and the analysis of tourism capacities; 2) the policy development and practicing of community-based tourism at the site; and 3) the evaluation of sustainable tourism development and plan revising. The tourism development application in each circle of the PAR model (as shown in figure 2) is based on the research findings from 322 questionnaires of tourists' satisfaction, site surveys covering 68 villages, in-depth interviews with local residents in 65 places of interest, seven-time brainstorming with key policy-makers from 17 government organizations and 72 tourism entrepreneurs at the district and provincial levels.

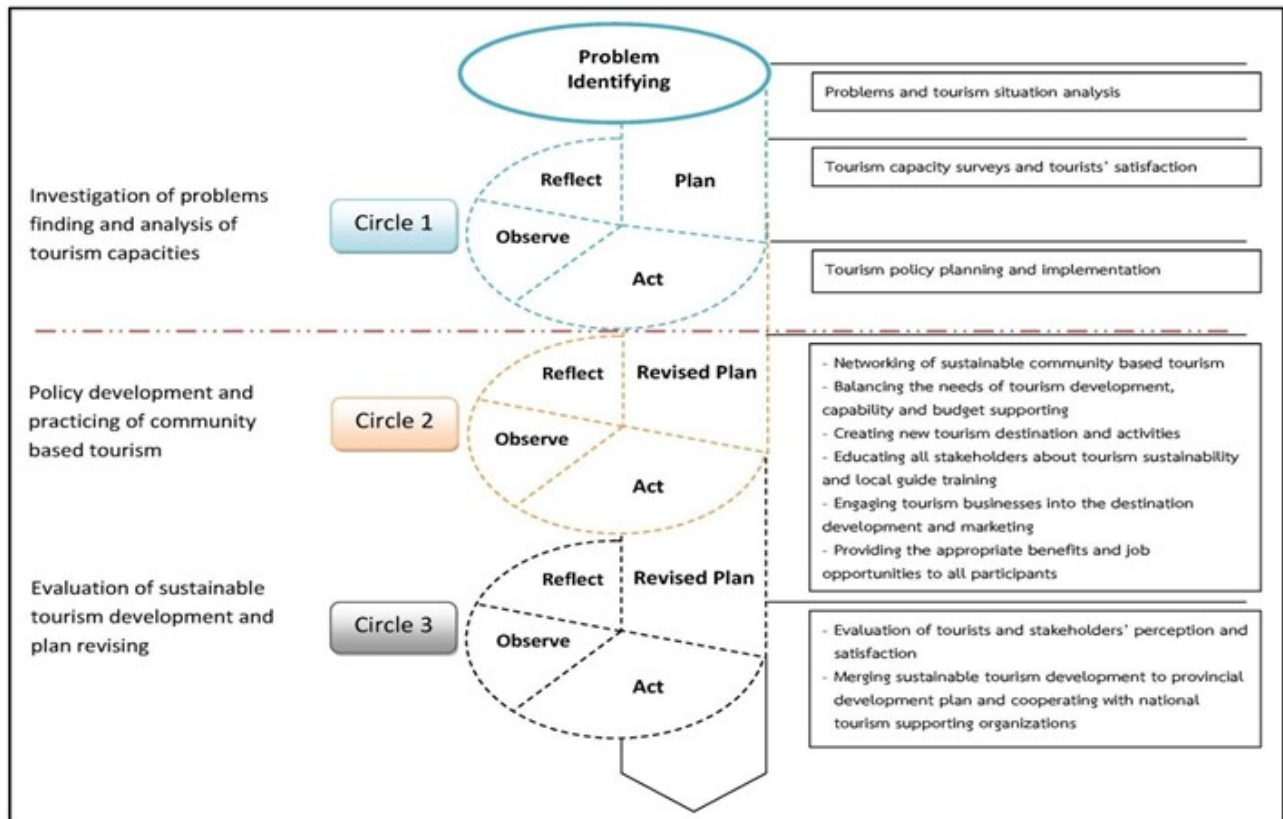
Data Analysis Methods

Regarding the research process of this study which was a mixed method research, data analysis occurred in every circle of the PAR model altogether with the implementation of the results. Qualitative data was analyzed by content analysis and triangulation rechecked altogether with descriptive statistic analysis for the quantitative data. After that all data were used for SWOT Analysis in order to prepare guidelines for tourism policy planning and practicing.

RESULTS

This research aims to develop sustainable community-based tourism by adapting the concept of participatory action research model or PAR model for a case study of Ubolrat district, Khon Kaen province, Thailand. The research results in each circle of the PAR model found that:

FIGURE 2
Location of the Study Area



Source: Adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) and Kindon et al. (2007)

Investigation of Problem Findings and Analysis of Tourism Capacities

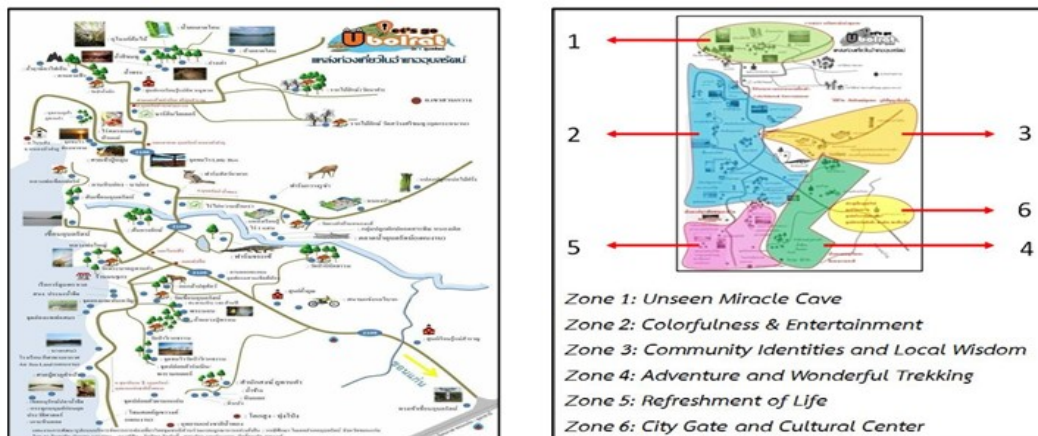
To understand the situation and reality of the current collaboration, the first step of this research was started with the problem investigations separated into two main parts which were tourism situation analysis and tourists’ satisfaction. For the problems and tourism situation analysis in the first circle of the PAR model, the data were collected via brainstorming with local residents, key policy-makers and tourism entrepreneurs in the district. It was found that the tourism situation at the site had been declining, the number of visitors had been decreasing and there were some serious conflicts between the local residents and tourism-related business people. The causes of this serious situation were business-related competition, over-consumption of tourism resources and development of new tourism destinations in neighbouring districts. Whereas, tourists’ satisfaction from 322 questionnaires found that most tourists’ purpose of travelling was holiday and relaxation; they were searching for tourism information, accommodation and services from the internet; costs involved with travelling were meals, accommodation, and transportation; they were satisfied with destinations, activities, accessibility, and accommodation; but recommended to improve tourism information provision, new tourism routes and activities, and interesting souvenir developments and designs. Moreover, the research teams, key policy-planners and national park officers also surveyed current tourism destinations in nearby districts and inspected 65 more interesting places. The results indicated that the district met problems with over-consumption in the current destinations, uninteresting activities, conflicts between business sectors, and the lack of new tourism destination developments and support.

Hence, the discussions about the solutions and tourism rejuvenation occurred in the second-time brainstorming between the research teams, local residents, tourism entrepreneurs, tourism policy-makers and national park boards. For this stage, all stakeholders agreed to solve the problems and plan for tourism policies based on sustainability concerning local residents’ benefits and resource capacity with their integrated collaboration and budget sharing.

Policy Development and Practicing of Community-Based Tourism

For the second circle of the PAR model in this study, all key stakeholders focused on community-based tourism policy development and practicing through four-time brainstorming. They started their participation by networking of a sustainable community-based tourism club in the district while balancing the needs of tourism development, capability and budget sharing from relevant government organizations and local authorities. With reference to the qualitative, quantitative and SWOT analysis, the appropriate tourism strategies for the current situation were attended to three main issues: new tourism destination development, creative tourism activity preparation, and tourism destination marketing and promotion in the campaign of ‘Let’s Go to Ubolrat’ (as shown in Figures 3 and 4). Furthermore, the key policy-makers and national park boards also provided opportunities for local residents and business people to share the ideas of tourism promotion and obtain acceptable benefits from new destination developments, which went along with educating all stakeholders on tourism sustainability and local guide training.

FIGURE 3
(Left). The Mapping of New Tourism Destinations from the Site Surveys



Evaluation of Sustainable Tourism Development and Plan Revising

The final circle of this PAR model, was focused on the evaluation of sustainable tourism development and practicing through the new tourism route and destination development, number of tourism activities and events at the site, together with tourists' perceptions and satisfaction. It was found that the implementation of the tourism development plan and practicing has been very successful and created significant changes in the site, especially, the integrated collaboration between all key stakeholders and conflict-solving. This success in participatory action research and sustainable community-based tourism development was an important inspiration for all stakeholders and local residents in regards to the sustainability ideals. All the stakeholders have been continuing the tourism implementation; merging the local sustainable tourism development to provincial development plan and cooperating with the national tourism supporting organization. Moreover, it was an achievement-related motivation to the nearby districts to learn and apply this PAR model in their areas as well.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With reference to the concept of PAR model (Green et al., 2003; Kemmis & McTaggart 2005; Kindon et al., 2007; and Capriello, 2012) and the study results, these indications show that a participatory action research is one approach method to reach realistic community-based tourism development as well as sustainable goals. Meanwhile, the difficulty of the research design was dependent upon the tourism situation in the study area and the possibility of a negotiation process between key stakeholders. However, these three circles of the PAR model of sustainable community-based tourism development could be the basic concept and adapted to other destinations in a similar context. Researchers and tourism planners could start the beginning stage from the investigation of problem findings, development needs and analysis of tourism capacities in the sites; then, engage all the key stakeholders to plan and implement concrete tourism practices based on the study results; finally, there should be an evaluation of the sustainable tourism development and plan revising as the continuous sustainable development spirals.

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