Development of a sustainable tourist destination based on the creative economy: A case study of Klong Kone Mangrove Community, Thailand

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ABSTRACT
Klong Kone Mangrove Community in Central Thailand is a famous destination for eco-tourism. The sustainability of tourist destinations is of vital concern to the creative economy concept. Thus, participatory action research was applied to investigate the local tourist attractions, to identify this destination’s problems, and to discuss potential solutions among the participants in the community. The results demonstrated that the main issue at this destination is the unequal distribution of income generated by tourism, which has caused severe conflicts among the local people. The solutions sourced from the panel discussion and questionnaires indicated that the majority of local people should be involved in the tourism industry and that tourism careers can attract younger people to return and work at home after graduation. Moreover, in order to enhance this destination’s sustainability based on the creative economy concept, the results from the study were summarized and four significant identities of Klong Kone were suggested: mangrove planting, opossum shrimp paste, water sports activities, and seafood restaurants. All of these should be promoted based on four keys: 1) careful design and planning in line with creative ideas, 2) prudence in the design and planning of tourism development that corresponds to the market, 3) community involvement that is capable of thinking, planning, using resources, and sharing consequences, and 4) designing tourism that adheres to the concepts of sustainable tourism.

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Introduction
The Klong Kone Mangrove Community is located in Klong Kone sub-district, Mueang district, Samut Songkhram province, Thailand. It is one of the most popular mangrove forest destinations for tourists visiting Thailand. There are many reasons why tourists come to visit this destination, such as its location on the Gulf of Thailand and its relatively close (72 km) proximity to Bangkok, as well as its tourist activities that consist of many recreational activities provided for tourists including mangrove reforestation, water skiing, observing coastal fisheries, and harvesting cockles. The attractiveness of these activities blends well with the natural surroundings to create an enjoyable, new, and unique experience associated with the community. For these reasons, Klong Kone sub-district has recently been focusing on the development of its tourism industry. The number of tourists has steadily increased, as have the various associated problems such as deterioration of the attractions of the destination and its environment, as well as social issues. Thus, this research aimed to determine the community’s potential and then to synthesize and
develop a sustainable tourism development model based on the creative economy and the involvement of the community. The research results can contribute to the involvement of all local people within the tourism industry. Through the creative economy, the value of the local resources and wisdom can be recovered and promoted.

**Literature Review**

The main aim of this study focused on the theories of sustainable tourism development and the concepts of the creative economy. These were applied to the proposed destination in order to help the community create effective strategies that can be implemented.

**Sustainable Tourism Development**

The concept and origin of sustainability was unofficially established in 1713 by von Carlowitz, who strongly asserted that the ongoing management of resources was the central idea of the concept of sustainable development (Waas, Huge, Verbruggen, & Wright, 2011). This idea was redefined again as a broad political vision in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Commission (WCED, 1987). They operationalized the concept of sustainability as the fulfilling of the needs of the present generation while allowing future generations to receive sufficiently high levels of benefits to meet their own needs. These goals are stated in the various definitions of sustainable tourism. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) definition is the one most commonly acknowledged (Dorcheh & Mohamed, 2012), in which sustainable tourism is defined as the process that leads to the management of all resources in order to be able to meet the current demands of tourists, while simultaneously preserving the benefits for the future, especially in the economic, social and environmental dimensions, as well as the development of the local tourism industry to enhance the needs of people in the future along with the needs of present-day tourists and host communities (WTO, 1995). From the point of view of Mowforth and Munt (2009), sustainable tourism is “one among other new forms of tourism that focuses on environmental issues that have been relabeled from ‘ecotourism’, which if sustainable tourism can play a role beyond simply balancing the economic, social or environmental factors, and also solve the problem of poverty for people in the community, it will be more likely accepted”.

Subsequently, this idea has been accepted in almost every country around the world. The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1995) provided more details on the process leading to sustainability, which divided sustainability into three dimensions: 1) ecological sustainability is a type of development with a specific focus on the preservation of the indispensable ecology and biodiversity; 2) social and cultural sustainability is the protection of unique cultures and values, and maintains and strengthens the community identity in order to guide the community’s development; and 3) economic sustainability ensures that the development is effective enough to reduce the poverty of the local population, and is compatible with the conservation of the local resources. Furthermore, Dredge, Cox, and Fisher (2009) described five achievements of a sustainable tourism destination, which adds two more criteria: first, responding to market changes now and in the future in order to encourage the flexible development of an appropriate business model; and second, increasing the destination’s attractiveness in order to increase the number of repeat visitors. Moreover, all that is mentioned above is compatible with the concepts of Mowforth and Munt (2009), who recommended seven key aspects that are useful for the sustainable development of tourism: 1) ecological sustainability, 2) social sustainability, 3) cultural sustainability, 4) economic sustainability, 5) the educational element, 6) local participation; and 7) the conservation element. Therefore, based on the World Tourism Organization (1995), Dredge et al. (2009), and Mowforth and Munt (2009), although there are varying numbers of sustainable tourism components, they are all concerned with the same broad areas of the ‘environment’, ‘economics’, and ‘society’. These are the three dimensions that Howie (2003) applied to construct the form of the ‘Triple Bottom Line’ (TBL) as a key development factor of sustainability, where the three dimensions are composed of terms that are similar in meaning to the ethical, economic, and ecological aspects of the destination.

**Creative Tourism**

As the creative economy has evolved and gained importance over the past two decades, the boundaries between the creative sectors have softened and creative knowledge and skills are being deployed in the wider economy (OECD, 2014). Such changes are also reflected in the developing relationship between the areas of tourism and the creative economy. Early creative tourism concepts were based on learning experiences related to traditional areas of culture and creativity. More recent models have been based on the integration of the tourism and creative industries as a whole, engaging not only consumers but also producers, policy makers, and knowledge institutions as well as related industries (Choibamroong, 2012).

Creative sectors such as design, fashion, gaming, and animation are now providing access to new markets and diversifying demand. They are also offering new possibilities to engage interactively with audiences and to facilitate co-creation with consumers, increasing engagement and developing new knowledge about customer needs. The real potential for value creation from this emerging relationship lies in the integration of tourist experiences with other creative content and concepts that can reach new target groups, help to improve the image and competitiveness of destinations, and support the growth of the creative industries and creative exports (Department for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2003).

The creative tourism model has the potential to influence many areas of tourism development and marketing because it implies a more innovative approach to tourism, with a shift from “hard” to “soft” infrastructure and the development of new business models. Conventional models of experience production, and consumption, such as tourism, will be supplemented by new models based on

Please cite this article in press as: Sangchumnong, A., Development of a sustainable tourist destination based on the creative economy: A case study of Klong Kone Mangrove Community, Thailand, Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences (2018), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2018.02.002
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