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Sustainable tourism development: A study on community resilience for rural tourism in Malaysia

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Abstract

The paper discusses the resiliency of the rural communities in Malaysia with the help of the sustainability planning in rural tourism. It covers the rural sustainable development background, the community resiliency elements and the role of the local government. The methodology includes site observation and extensive literature reviews. The findings of the research suggest that a sustainable tourism development in rural area will contribute to an improved resiliency within the local community. Some strategies are needed to ensure the sustainable development or rural tourism and to sustain the local community resiliency.

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Keywords: Sustainable development; resilience; rural tourism

1. Introduction

Theories of community resilience have been around for several decades, and today, they are expanding to reflect the broader ability of communities to respond to any form of unanticipated or unpredictable social or environmental change. According to many studies done earlier (Calgaro et al, 2008; Landau, Mittal & Wieling, 2008; Tobin & Whiteford, 2002; Twigg, 2007; Walsh, 2007), community resilience has always been associated with disaster. The concepts of community resilience refer to the capacity of individual or community to cope with stress, overcome adversity or adapt positively to change. The

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ability to bounce back from negative experiences may reflect the innate qualities of individuals or be the result of learning and experience. Regardless of the origin of resilience, there is evidence to suggest that it can be developed and enhanced to promote greater wellbeing. Resilience cannot be regarded as a quality that is either present or absent in a person or a group, but rather a process may vary across circumstances or time (Luthar, 2003). Sustainable development is one of the most cited examples of actions that make a community more resilient. A fundamental understanding of the aspect of community resilient in sustainable tourism is important. The information can be used for further testing and development of sustainability and resiliency indices for rural tourism communities in Malaysia.

This proposed study aims (i) to deliberate on whether the sustainable development is possible for rural tourism in the country; and (ii) to discuss and interpret the factors contributing to the resiliency of rural tourism community. Rural tourism communities are most vulnerable to economic shock and environmental hazards that could disrupt livelihoods and community well-being. This is in-line with the Malaysia government's *Economic Transformation Program* (ETP) as the finding of this research should assist the tourism based rural communities to raise and shield their tourism activities and income from unanticipated or unpredictable social or environmental change. Any effort to improve the tourism profits and benefits through the inclusiveness of the community is recognized as one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) as outlined in the Malaysian government strategic planning.

In the current phenomenon of globalization, the understanding of resilience in the vulnerable sectors of social-ecological systems is extremely important. The community-based tourism sector is highly vulnerable not only to internal challenges such as passive community and leadership problems, but also to external challenges such as economic recession, rivalry from other tourism products and more. However, in the face of large disturbances, the aspects that deliberate resilience to rural tourism sector have not been studied to date. Indeed, the insufficient studies on resilience in tourism systems furnish conceptual perspectives on the worth of the resilience concept to understanding tourism (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004) and qualitative applications of the concept to protected spans and community-based tourism (Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2011).

2. Literature review

Rural tourism can be considered as a potentially good product in promoting the country as well as getting the community involved in the travel industry. In Malaysia, rural tourism contributes in achieving the Government's agenda to build job opportunities and eliminate poverty of the communities involved. Other than that, it can be seen as a way to aid in generating income for the communities (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013). Rural tourism appeared as a potential solution to the mass tourism's negative effects in developing countries. It is also one of the strategies for the community to achieve better living conditions. The main idea is for the community to create a project that presents a sustainable development and promote the relationship between local community and visitors. To develop a tourism product as such, the core characteristic is to incorporate hotel management, tourism management, food and beverage and complementary services all together. Not to forget other subsystems such as infrastructure, health, education and environment (Cioce, Bona & Ribeiro, 2007).

It should be noted that community based tourism is protected and supported by various international organizations such as the World Tourism Organization and the aim is towards achieving a high quality visitor experience, conservation of natural and cultural resources, development of social and economic and community's empowerment and ownership. Furthermore, the focal benefits of community tourism are the economic impact on communities, improvements of socioeconomic and a more sustainable lifestyle diversification (Manyara & Jones, 2007). According to the swap of knowledge, analysis and ability among members of the community, it is a useful method of executing policy coordination,

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