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Creating a Network of Youth in Sustainable Tourism Development in the Greater Mekong Sub-region Case study: Nakhon Phanom, Thailand and Khammouan, Laos PDR

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Abstract

The tourism industry has become significantly important sector in economic cooperation between the countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). A focus on the development of young people as a major force in the development of sustainable tourism would be developed to benefit the economic, social, cultural and environmental needs continuing development together with the GMS countries by creating a network for knowledge sharing. First, the study of attitude of the local youth towards sustainable tourism in the GMS at Nakhon Phanom and Khammouan was revealed that the group of youth had been developed by plans of participating in five aspects of the development of sustainable tourism: the problem searching, the planning, the operation, the benefit and the evaluation. Secondly, the results from this study were taken and integrating into the project of creating a sustainable tourism industry in the GMS network of youth in Nakhon Phanom and Laos PDR. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how to build a network of youth in order to increase their awareness of sustainable tourism in the GMS by using the action research with the application of A-I-C for participatory planning as a tool. Thirdly, this study also analyzes and synthesizes the results of the previous quantitative study along with findings from interview, group discussion and direct observation from qualitative study for searching a guideline of sustainable tourism by youth. The results from a model of the guideline in sustainable tourism by youth using the English letters form "TEAM" showed that participants have exchanged the knowledge and the operational experience from the sustainable tourism community which guided them to understand problems of tourism in the community. Participants have also participated in tourism plans, implemented in the sustainable tourism, received mutual benefits and evaluations in order to develop the community together effectively.

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Keywords: Network, Youth, Participation, Sustainable Tourism Development, Greater Mekong Sub-region

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1. Introduction

Development of human resources, which is “a social capital”, plays an important role as a labor force for the development of income, which is “an economic capital” of each country. In particular, the development of “Youth” is a major force in the development of any country. Moreover, the development strategy for the countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) was featured heavily on the tourism industry, which is the fastest growing industry in the world and also the highest mutual benefit for each country as well. The tourism and service industry is an important sector in economic cooperation which generates enormous value income to the GMS countries in each year. Although, the tourism and service industry will be good for the economy, however, due to tourism development, the cooperation of the local community is required in order to achieve tourism sustainable development. There are numerous studies that demonstrate the attitude of local people towards tourism development. However, limited research had discussed the attitudes and perceptions of the youth in the development of local sustainable tourism. Also, limited study was shown the importance of developing a network of youth as the key to sustainable tourism development. Hence, there are a few questions, how attitudes and perceptions of the youth play as an important key in the development of sustainable tourism? Also, how to create a network of youth in order to increase their awareness of sustainable tourism? Therefore, this paper contains three major objectives. First is to study attitudes and perceptions of the local youth towards sustainable tourism development in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. Second is to investigate how to build a network of youth in order to increase their awareness of sustainable tourism development in the GMS by using the action research with the application of A-I-C approach for participatory planning as a tool. Third is to searching a guideline of sustainable tourism model for building the network of youth.

2. Literature Review

- *The important of attitude and perception of locals youth in sustainable tourism development*

Sustainable development is a major conceptual framework for local community development. Also, general definition of sustainable development that is widely used for tourism-based communities in which policies and actions attempt to balance social, economic and environmental costs and benefits (Hall & Lew in Ahmad et al., 2015: 118)

In the context of this study, statistical definitions of youth, such as that of the World Tourism Organization generally include young people aged between 15 and 29 years (WTO, 1991), although the study of youth outbound travel of the Germans, the British & the French on 2002 used ‘15-25 years’ as the average age (UNWTO, 2002), while other studies adopt an upper age limit of 26 (Horak & Webber in Novelli, 2005). The study of locals’ attitudes and perceptions –young people were included in the context of locals– toward tourism greatly contributes to maximize the positive impacts of tourism and minimize its negative impacts (Williams & Lawson, 2001). Locals’ attitudes towards tourism change over different tourism development stages. Changes in character of interaction between locals and tourist depend on the numbers of latter; when tourism activities led to high volume mass tourism, effects might finally reach a level that would disturb local community residents (Doxey, 1976). Greiner (2010) considers that while economic benefits, including increased business activity and employment, arise from the development of tourism in remote areas, there can be social and environmental costs. It is thus remarkable to appeal to young people in order to make them participants in all the stages of the tourism development of the area. When young locals trust and are committed to a place, they may form such strong connections with it that it becomes reflective of their self-concept (Kemp, Childers, & Williams, 2012). Young locals need to find graceful the place they live, whether this is a city, a town or a neighborhood. Young locals are an important target group, they are the ‘insiders’ to whom the place intends to promote its attractive and variant elements that connect and bring them together; hence, policy makers in charge of regional tourism development and marketers who initiate marketing strategies must take into consideration that the youths of a region are a productive target market that they need to approach and attract attention (Cassel, 2008).

Economic contribution from tourism has been treated as an important benefit of the industry offering another

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