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The Praxis of Langkawi's Sustainable Regeneration Strategy through Eco-Tourism

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Abstract

The praxis of the island resort's adaptation to the changing environment includes good socio-economic policies suitable to the island's core attraction, the pristine geological parks. In the case of the island resort of Langkawi, the artisanal agricultural livelihood has been replaced by eco-tourism, hence, limiting the income of the indigenous people. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to provide insights on the indigenous communities' strategy in leveraging eco-tourism demands with regenerated ecological resources in the island resort of Langkawi. The project employed qualitative methodology in gaining access to rich, in-depth data. The findings showed that the Langkawi locals have yet to adapt to change but with proper political interventions, the islanders' socio-economic well-being should continue to leverage the natural resources.

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1. 1. Introduction

In the face of climate change and increased development, environmental acclimatization includes looking for alternatives for socio-economic improvement. For the island resort of Langkawi, Malaysia, agriculture is no longer a sustainable income generating venture as eco-tourism has taken over paddy planting and artisanal fishing. Though the latter livelihoods are still actively practiced, the younger

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generation has moved on to embrace easier job scopes in the tourism industry. Hence, the dual objectives of the original study were to describe the income generating endeavors among the indigenous people of Langkawi, which subsequently, will be correlated to the influence level of geo-park tourism in socio-economic development among the same communities. Nevertheless, in assisting the stakeholders to improve their livelihood and quality of life, the change to a modern occupation to suit the current times are not without challenges. As the cultural background, values and mores of the Malays, which formed 90% of the population, are still internalized in that society, the adapting to change are not without challenges (Erdeli & Dinca, 2011). Although some parts of Langkawi have been developed and modernized in tandem with the tourism demands, small, quaint fishing villages where the lifestyles have been the same for centuries populate most parts of the island. These villages are, for the most part, protected locations which have not succumbed to the impact of tourism. As noted by Erdeli and Dinca (2011), most of the communities are located in the rural areas but are surrounded by modern infrastructure to cater to the tourism development, yet they have to cope with the rising costs within their very own habitat of natural resources. Consequently, the Langkawi local authorities and relevant government agencies such as the Langkawi Municipal Council, the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), the Langkawi Land and Mineral Office and the Tourism Malaysia have all combined their efforts in ensuring similar developmental targets are attained. Whilst doing so, the ecological and geological aspects of the island are preserved.

1.1. Sustainable regeneration and the transformation theory

Modern times do not necessarily mean socio-economic comfort for disadvantaged communities. In the case of Langkawi, agro and aquaculture has been the mainstay for the generations of Langkawians. With environmentalism, the time has come for the islanders to re-examine the wide ranging ecological impacts from the climate change to global warming, and to do something about them (Bhatti, 2001). The depletion of consumable resources in particular, agriculture will result in loss of food and economic sustenance for people whose livelihood has been dependent on such sources. For the islanders, rice has been traditionally been and will continue to be their staple diet. Therefore, sustainable regeneration is the alternative for a better livelihood.

In understanding the term, Percy (2003) described sustainable regeneration as involving environmental sustainability, economic efficiency and meeting social needs. Applying this to the scope of the study, rapid developments in some parts of that island have resulted in land depletion for example, paddy fields. Families in Langkawi have relied on rice for food and paddy fields have made up the major landscape of island. Besides paddy, many villagers are reliant on fishing and aquaculture. As is the norm, fishing villages have dotted the Langkawi coastal landscape for centuries. Now that Langkawi has become a popular island destination for beach holidays and geo-park activities, the value of the real estate has increased tremendously. Hence, the indigenous people have sold much of their land to make way for new, tourism developments. With no land and for daily subsistence, it is normal for the community to resort to the exploitation of other natural resources such as mangrove felling for charcoal production. Similar activities were done by the communities living near the River Nile and this practice is not sustainable and is environmentally destructive (Nyeko, 2009). Realizing the extent of this exploitation, the local authorities provided the communities with other options for livelihood, namely, geo-park and eco-tourism entrepreneurial activities.

In relating sustainable regeneration to the theory of transformation, the comprehension of the said theory and the research gap are important matters to consider. As noted by McLennan, Ritchie, Ruhanen, and Moyle (2014), the “transformation theory attempts to understand the long-run process of structural shifts that occur in an industry and economy as a result of institutional change.” Moreover, while the

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