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# The integrated learning of community-based tourism in Thailand

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## Abstract

This paper presents an initial effort to evaluate college students' understanding of the concept of community-based tourism (CBT) based on integrated learning. In particular, it examines the perceptions of students towards the components of traditional classroom-lectures, fieldtrips, fieldworks and also business plan proposals from the students for distinctive community-based tourism destinations. Forty eight questionnaires will be distributed among the 4th year students of the International College for Sustainability Studies, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand that undertook the course in the second semester of 2012. Data analysis is to be processed by statistical programme software and accordingly categorised into groups of data by thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students had a high satisfaction of integrated learning of CBT as are provide a holistic understanding of community-based tourism from the principles and practices based on integrated learning, as they need to study the theories and principles in the classroom, observe and survey by fieldtrips and fieldwork and practice the development of business plans for community-based tourism destinations through group work. The paper finishes with a concluding discussion and implications for future research and practitioners.

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*Keywords:* integrated learning; community-based tourism; tourism learning in Thailand

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Community-based tourism (CBT) has tended to increase in popularity in recent times especially in developing countries as it is considered as the appropriate approach that can bring benefits to the community as well as encourage the traditional and cultural way of life and environmental resources (Scheyvens, 2002). In the context of Thailand, CBT development is encouraged by the government as it has been scoped in the 8<sup>th</sup> National

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Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) during 1997-2001 until the recent one the 11<sup>th</sup> NESDP during 2012-2016 as it could highlight the sustainability issues of environment and local benefits (Ministry of Tourism & Sport, 2011). In concerning the significance of CBT, International College for Sustainability Studies, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand has provided the course ECO413 Community-based tourism development since 2002 in order to enhance students with the comprehensive ideas and concepts relating to community based ecotourism development. The expected outcome from this course is that students gain the ability to create their own business plans for communities of their choosing that can be of benefit to CBT destinations. This course has been instructed by traditional classroom-lectures, field work, field trip and business plan proposals.

However, there are still limited studies that evaluated the outcomes from a student perspective, whether or not they are satisfied and deeply understand the concept of CBT through this integration of learning. Hence, this study aims to evaluate the students' understanding of the concept of CBT and their ability to apply this comprehensive knowledge towards the creation of a business plan for a CBT destination and thus propose the implications for future research and practitioners.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

- To assess the satisfaction and better understanding of students from the integrated learning of CBT
- To propose suggestions for CBT learning which could provide benefits to community within the principles of sustainability

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Hatter (1999), community-based tourism or CBT is under the umbrella of sustainability, which emerged from fears of overconsumption of resources and degradation of the environment, seeking to ensure that meeting the needs of the present did not affect the needs of future generations and focuses on well-being of people as well as the conservation of the environment (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). CBT can be defined as 'a situation in which local people, usually those that are poor or economically marginalised in very rural parts of the world, open up their homes and communities to visitors seeking sustainably achieved cultural, educational or recreational travel experiences' (O'neil, 2008). CBT's main focus is on the host community, encouraging their involvement, participation and their benefit from tourism and also to educate and encourage them towards sustainable tourism development (Pookaiyudom, 2012: 65). Hence, CBT mainly concerns the participation of local people who welcome visitors to seek experiences of their cultural, educational and recreational communities. However, the visitors themselves have limited evidence of responsible tourist behaviours based on environmental concerns (Sharpley, 2006; Swarbrooke & Horner 1999), consequently, pollution caused by tourists is the effect (Mowl, 2002).

To enhance the student's grasp of these aspects, integrated learning is essential in order to form a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary issues of CBT in Thailand along with an increased awareness of responsible tourist behaviour as well as the ability to create a business plan for community based tourism using the concepts of local participation and the sustainable approach.

In regards to the term of integrated learning, it refers to 'an educational outcome of collegiate education based on the premise that intellectual study should connect in meaningful ways to everyday life (AAC & U 2002; Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, 2004; Barber, 2009). Roberts and Kellough (2000) also suggest that the integrative teaching and learning is an appropriate design to bring about effective learning as it

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