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Developing Human Capital for Rural Community Tourism: Using Experiential Learning Approach

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Abstract

Community awareness, lack of tourism knowledge and skills are the basic constraints that limit the ability of the local people to actively participate in the tourism planning and development. In Malaysia, Miso Walai Homestay at Kinabatangan, Sabah was recognized as one of the best Community Based Tourism Model not only at national level but at the international level. Thus, this study was to explore the process of community capacity building particularly on the aspect of awareness, knowledge, skills as well as attitude of the rural community that enable them to involve themselves in tourism planning. This study applies a qualitative approach by conducting in-depth interview with key informants. All the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results of the study showed that about 3 years has been used by the NGO together with the pioneer MESCOT members for the capacity building particularly on the human capital development. The knowledge, skills as well as awareness of the local people have been developed through experiential learning approach.

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1. Introduction

Community Based Tourism (CBT) is an alternative form of tourism that was developed based on the negotiation and participation of key stakeholders in the destination (Saarinen, 2006). Several other authors viewed CBT as tourism that was owned and managed by the community. CBT is a form of tourism 'where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remains within the community'. It is a form of rural tourism that has increasingly been accepted in most of developing countries as a strategy towards poverty reduction. Human resource development is an essential component that needs to be addressed in the early stage of development. The most important human resources development challenge in rural tourism seem to be equipping local communities with the required knowledge, skills

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and awareness to enable them to meaningfully participate in the tourism development. As stated by Moscardo (2008) lack of knowledge is the main barrier of the community to effectively participate in the rural tourism development. There is still lack of research conducted particularly in the tourism area on the process of human capital development for rural tourism purposes. Thus, the main purpose of this paper is to explore how the knowledge, skill, awareness as well as experiences of the rural community in the District of Batu Puteh, Kinabatangan Sabah have been developed for tourism.

2. Human Resource Development for Community Based Tourism

CBT has been recognized as a catalyst for social economic development (Hall and Jenkins, 1998). It has also been used as a strategy for the development of countries worldwide (Davis & Morais, 2004; McCool, Moisey & Nickerson, 2001) particularly in the developing countries. The concept of CBT has emerged in response to the negative impact of mass tourism that took place during the early stages of tourism development; particularly towards local people (Murphy, 1985). Due to the potential of CBT towards community development, many rural communities have turned to tourism as a way of diversifying their economy activities (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Mair, 2006). Even though most tourism scholars have theoretically agreed upon the potential and roles of CBT towards community development, not many governments or NGO driven projects have succeeded in reality (Goodwin and Santilli, 2009, Moscardo, 2008). Goodwin and Santilli (2009) revealed that the large majority of CBT projects enjoy very little success, and the most likely outcome for a CBT initiative is its collapse, after funding dries up (Mitchell and Muskoy, 2008). In many other situations, benefits have been slow to emerge. They are modest at best and usually limited to a specific group within the community (Moscardo, 2008). The main challenges that hinder the rural community to actively participate and benefit from the tourism development are due to the human resources development. Most of the rural people have less learning opportunities and exposure compared to those who are living in the urban area. Thus, of course they have limited knowledge, skills and resources to involve in the tourism development and management. Whereas the local people involvement has commonly accepted as a pre-requisite not only to localize tourism benefits but also limit some of the socio-economic problems. Human Resource Development (HRD) is the framework for helping employees develop their personal and organizational skills, knowledge, and abilities. Learning opportunities is an essential component towards human resource development. Learning is the process by which skills, knowledge and attributes are acquired and translated into habitual forms of behaviour and performance, whether by design or through the natural passage of time. C. Rogers distinguished two types of learning: cognitive (meaningless) and experiential (significant). The key to the distinction is that experiential learning deals with the needs and wants of the learner. Rogers lists these qualities of experiential learning: personal involvement, self initiated, evaluated by learner, and pervasive effects on learning. This approach emphasized on the learner's real experience as a main component in the learning process. David A. Kolb (1975) has developed a model of learning based on experience known as the Kolb's Learning Cycle. In this model there are four vital components in the learning process which are Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Active Experimentation. This means that someone who learns something new based on his or her own experiences will form a new concept which will be used in the real situation.

3. Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative study using the case study approach in order to understand in-depth the development of awareness, knowledge and skills of community members in the development of community tourism in Batu Puteh, Kinabatangan Sabah. The Miso Walai Homestay in Batu Puteh is chosen as a case study because the community tourism development in that area is a local community initiative that received various awards in Malaysia as well as international accolades as a model of sustainable tourism development. Data was collected by semi-structured interview conducted amongst 14 key informants which consists of Pioneer MESCOT members who were involved in the tourism development from the beginning. This is because interview is an important source of information in a qualitative study (Yin, 2003). This method provides a way of generating data by asking people to talk about or share their views or experiences (Lebar, 2007, Yin, 2003) The transcripts of the interview were analyzed by using thematic analysis.

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