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A repositioning strategy for rural tourism in Malaysia- community's perspective

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Abstract

The local community is an important stakeholder in rural tourism. However the rural tourism positioning strategies have been developed from the perspective of a single stakeholder tourist, and have overlooked at local community's perspective. It is important to include community's perspective because rural tourism cannot be successful without community support. There is lack of approach to highlight the issues hindering the active participation of communities in tourism planning and implications. The aim of this research is to develop a framework for repositioning of rural tourism, by addressing community approach rather than just a tourist industry. The proposed framework, developed on the indicators from literature, will help to explore local community's perspective on current positioning and will identify the gaps for a potential repositioning. The study will provide insights to local communities, government, policymakers and other stakeholders and help them to develop effective rural tourism strategies.

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1. Introduction

Active participation of local communities is significant for a successful rural tourism and a high level of community integration in tourism planning leads to greater socioeconomic benefits (Mitchell & Reid, 2001). Ideally, tourism in rural areas is developed using the essential characters and resources of a particular place which include natural environments, local culture and traditional system of land use and farming. However the rural tourism plans

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often give more importance to economic gains and tourist satisfaction and less emphasis is being placed on the participation of local communities (Liu, 2006). The community participation also plays an important role in tourism image building, which is a main issue faced by the tourism industry in Malaysia (Mohamad, Ali, & Ghani 2011). Moreover in the current globalization era, Malaysia has to face tough competition to position its tourism products in ASEAN (Associate of South East Asian Nations) countries that also consider tourism as an important contributing sector to their economy (Mohamed, 2009). In tourism market, positioning strategies has been used as an effective tool for image building and to differentiate a product from rest of the other competitive destinations. However these positioning strategies are derived from the experience and perspective of single stakeholder tourist. For successful tourism development, community leaders and tourism planners need to view tourism as a 'local community industry'. Previous work done by the researcher Shaista, Lo, and Yeo (2013) has focused on internal (local community) and external stakeholder (tourist) perspective on repositioning strategy for rural tourism. But this study will mainly focus on community perspective about rural tourism. The purpose of this research is to develop a framework for repositioning of rural tourism, by addressing community approach. For this purpose, in-depth literature reviews are used to identify the factors that facilitate active participation of local community in rural tourism. The results are expected to provide insight for the development of a framework relating to the assessment of the potential for sustainable rural tourism development in a rural area.

2. Why Repositioning

Effective positioning is a mutually beneficial process to both the marketer and the consumer. It offers the customer benefits tailored to solve a problem related to their needs, in a way that is different to competitors (Chacko, 1996). There are multiple stakeholders involved in tourism development; hence the development of a successful rural tourism is dependent on fulfilling the objectives of all stakeholders in the system. The inter relationships among the stakeholders must be fully identified since each stakeholder's needs may be different from the others. A considerable amount of literature has been published on positioning of tourism destinations (Botha, Crompton, & Kim, 1999; Chen & Uysal, 2002; Crompton, Fakeye, & Lue, 1992; Frochot & Kreziak, 2008; Haahti, 1986; H.-b. Kim, 1998; S. S. Kim & Agrusa, 2005; Pike, 2012; Pike & Ryan, 2004). Yet, few have addressed the issues of destination positioning analysis and the role of affective participation of local community (Lo, Mohamad, Songan, & Yeo, 2012). Much of these studies have focused on tourist's perspective and less focus on local stakeholders involved. As Buhalis (2000) explains that marketing destinations concentrates on increasing visitation and treats tourism like any other commodity, while planning literature concentrates more on the tourism impacts, limiting tourism development, often ignoring the market dynamics and the requirements of entrepreneurs at the destination. This approach fails to recognise the unique needs and limitations of each destination as well as their particular geographical, environmental and socio-cultural characteristics. At this point a useful reference can be made to the study done by Liu (2006); it provides in-depth analysis of the rural tourism in Kedah Malaysia and proposes that insufficient attention has been given to local capacity building, integrating local settlements and a misplaced notion of professionalism. This resulted in differences between local community and tourists. Supported by another study, Lo et al, (2011) have argued that local communities are not aware of the tourist needs, which affects service quality and thus finally results in unsatisfied tourists. In contrast, tourists are also not properly sensitized on local culture. Past studies have posited that tourism have caused damages to sociocultural characteristics of local residents (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005), local community exploitation and environmental damaging (Brida, Osti, & Faccioli, 2011).

To provide a competitive edge to Malaysia rural tourism industry and to convey its attractiveness to the target market, there is strong need to manage the resources in such a way that economic and social needs can be fulfilled by inclusion of all stakeholders including local community while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems as defined a sustainable tourism by WTO (1998) (Berno & Bricker, 2001). This will also need to involve careful monitoring of tourist satisfaction level, local community's capacity building and continually monitoring their reaction to tourism activities and tourists.

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