

Sustainable Tourism Development of Nan Province, Thailand

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ABSTRACT:

The objective of this research is to study 1) the levels of sustainable tourism development, government roles, awareness and involvement of local communities, impact of tourism development policy, and benefits from tourism; and 2) the influence of government roles, awareness and involvement of local communities, impact of tourism development policy, and benefits from tourism on the sustainable tourism development. This research used quantitative research methods. The sample group consists of 320 people in the Nan Province area. The sample size was determined using the criteria of 20 times of the observed variables. The research tools were the questionnaires using a multi-step sampling method. The data was collected from the questionnaires and was analyzed by descriptive statistics and structural equation models. The research results revealed that 1) sustainable tourism development, government roles, impact from tourism development policy, awareness and involvement of local communities, and benefits from tourism were at a high level, and 2) benefits from tourism entirely influenced the sustainable tourism development the most followed by government roles and awareness and involvement of local communities, respectively.

Keywords: Tourism development, sustainable tourism development, government roles

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Introduction

In 2017, the world tourism had redefined the new form of travel that has become popular among the new generation into 3 trends; 1. Bleisure (business and leisure), 2. Travel to open up new experience as you can see in the Northern Lights chasing in Iceland that the coordinates of the previously hidden territories were discovered by young travelers, and 3. Sustainable Travel. In 2017, the United Nations declared the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development to tackle the problems of poverty, gender equality, and environmental sustainability by using tourism as an important factor (UNWTO, 2015).

In 2019, the Booking.com website conducted the survey about the insights on sustainable tourism from more than 18,000 travelers from around the world and found that most travelers intended to travel sustainably but they encountered various problems. For example, 37 percent of the tourists did not know how to make their travel sustainable tourism, 36 percent said they could not afford the increasing expenses from sustainable tourism, while 34 percent said that sustainable tourism sites were few and hard to find compared to general tourism (Booking.com, 2019; Casas-Rosal et al., 2019; Bae & Han, 2019; Aras, 2019). The survey

results show that foreign tourists encounter problems, shortage, or access to sustainable tourism destinations. Meanwhile, looking back to Thailand, it was found that more than 26.5 million tourists visited Thailand generating more than 1.2 trillion baht of income to the country (Economic, Tourism and Sports Division, 2019). It is an interesting figure for the tourism industry of Thailand. Whether there is a natural disaster, a political disaster, or any event, many tourists still flock to Thailand every year. That means a good economy in the community. However, the local communities in the main tourist destinations such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, Pattaya have reflected the problems arising from tourism such as traffic jam, congestion, and migration because of not affording the cost of living (Special Area Development Administration Organization For sustainable tourism (Public Organization), 2018). The problems that arise with large tourist cities do not occur with smaller secondary cities such as Nan Province whose Muang Municipality received the Kinnaree award which was an award for quality tourism from the Tourism Authority of Thailand for 3 consecutive times. Until last year (2019), the Tourism Authority of Thailand awarded Kinnaree and Kinnaree Gold Hall of

Fame to the Muang Nan Municipality from creating the model for managing a large area to become a quality tourist destination. Thus, the importance of sustainable tourism development resulting from the role of government expression and the response of the people made the researchers interested in studying sustainable patterns for tourism development in Nan Province in order to apply the obtained knowledge in developing the policies and various measures related to the sustainable tourism development of Nan Province and the neighboring areas further.

Research objectives

1. To study the levels of sustainable tourism development, government roles, awareness and involvement of local communities, impact of tourism development policy, and benefits from tourism.
2. To study the influence of government roles, awareness and involvement of local communities, impact of tourism development policy, and benefits from tourism on the sustainable tourism development.

Research methodology

This research is the quantitative research. The target population is 428,227 people in Nan province of which 1,465 people are older than 18 years (Department of Provincial Administration, 2019). The researcher determined the sample size according to Kline's concept (Kline, 2005). It was suggested that there should be 20 samples per observed variable. In this study, there were 20 empirical variables. The sample group consisted of 320 persons using multi-stage sampling.

The research tools were questionnaires with the content validity and IOC value of greater than 0.50 in every item. The reliability of the measure revealed that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was entirely 0.981. It could be said that the measure was reliable. The data was collected by distributing questionnaires.

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, and structural equation modeling (SEM).

Research results

1. The levels of sustainable tourism development were at the high level (mean = 4.06). The government roles were at the high level (mean = 3.86). The awareness and involvement of local communities were at the high level (mean = 3.87). The impact of tourism development policy was at the high level (mean = 3.92). The benefits from tourism was entirely at the high level (mean = 4.13).

2. For the results of the model analysis, when considering the overall, it was found that the good entry indicators with every data were as follows: 1) The Chi-square/df was 1.92, 2) The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.048, 3) The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was 0.033, 4) The goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.95, 5) The adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) was 0.91, 6) The comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.99, 7) The parsimony goodness-of-fit (PGFI) was 0.56, and 7) The critical N (CN) was 214.52. This means the empirical data and the model are good fit (Suphamas Angsuchote et al, 2011; Kline, 2005).

2.1) The sustainable tourism development depends on the government roles and the benefits gained from tourism. 94 percent can explain the variation in sustainable tourism development while the local community awareness and involvement and the impact from tourism development policy have no direct impact on the sustainable tourism development.

2.2) The benefits gained from tourism depends on the government roles and the local community awareness and involvement. 93 percent can explain the variation in benefits gained from tourism.

2.3) The impact from tourism development policy depends on the government roles and the local community awareness and involvement. 51 can

explain the variation in the impact from tourism development policy.

Direct and indirect influence of variables towards sustainable tourism development

The results of the model analysis in the T-value model represents the influence of the latent variables which directly and indirectly affect the

sustainable tourism development. Therefore, the researcher applied the analysis of structural equations to present direct and indirect influence and sum of all latent variables to show the influence of factors affecting sustainable tourism development as shown in Table 1.

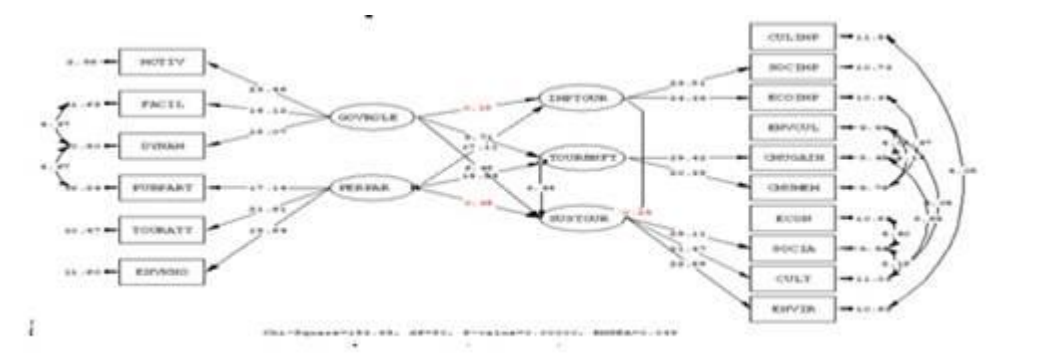
Table 1 Direct, indirect, and total influence of the studied factors

Independent variables	Causal relationship		
	Direct	Indirect	Total
Government roles	0.37**	0.13**	0.50**
Local community awareness and involvement	0.42	0.11*	0.11*
Impact from tourism development policy	0.31	-	0.31
Benefits gained from tourism	0.55**	-	0.55**

**At the statistical significant level of 0.01. *At the statistical significant level of 0.05

According to Table 1, it was found that the benefits gained from tourism had the most overall influence on sustainable tourism development followed by government roles and local community awareness and involvement, respectively. When considering only the factors directly affecting the sustainable tourism

development, benefits gained from tourism had the most overall influence on sustainable tourism development followed by government roles. However, the impact from tourism development policy has no direct or indirect influence on sustainable tourism development.



Result discussion

1 Benefits from tourism are the variables that directly affect and overall to the sustainable tourism development of Nan Province the most due to the awareness of the tourism impacts of the villagers in the community from tourism development and the support of the local

community to achieve sustainable development (Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990). Developing any area to become a tourist attraction yields the great effect on the way of life of the local people. Getting support from local people is a very important part of the planning, development of the operation, and the sustainability of tourism

(Uysal, & Jurowski, 1994). In order for people in the community to cooperate in the development of tourism in the province, it is important to the benefits that the local people or the community or the province will receive. Local people will see how tourism development will benefit from development. It can be explained by social exchange theory that local residents will continue to support tourism development as long as they can expect or perceive that the benefits derived from tourism will become greater than the costs that will incur. This concept, therefore, divides consumers' perceptions into 2 aspects; benefits and cost incurred from tourism. The recognition of benefits of tourism plays an important role in encouraging communities to embrace and support tourism development. On the other hand, the cost recognition will result in communities resisting or refusing to accept the tourism development plans (Dyer, Gursoy, Sharma, & Carter, 2007; Mason & Cheyne, 2002; Huttasin, 2008).

When considering the benefits received from tourism development, it was found that tourism increased the demands for local arts (Gursoy, & Rutherford, 2004). It helped developing cultural identity, local pride, and cohesion of villagers. It also enhanced cultural knowledge among local people (Huttasin, 2008). Tourism, therefore, plays an important role in creating opportunities for intercultural exchange as well as preserving the local arts and culture not to be lost over time (Ibrahim, & Razzaq, 2010). It can help developing the image of the community (Shani, & Pizam, 2012) and promote the quality of life of the people in the community to a higher level (Huttasin, 2008).

The above concept of social exchange was consistent with the research results of many researchers finding that the perception of tourism benefits has a significant effect on local tourism support, i.e., when people perceive the great benefits of tourism, they are more likely to accept tourism development plans. The basic concept of benefit perception focuses on economic, cultural, social and environmental benefits (Choi, &

Murray, 2010; Dyer, et al., 2007; Lankford, & Howard, 1994; Vargas-Sanchez, et al. ., 2011). When considering, it will find that tourism benefits can be classified as environmental and cultural benefits, community benefits and the interests of community members. All benefits in various fields give returns to the community in different perspectives.

2) The government roles had direct and indirect influence with the second overall influence on sustainable tourism development in Nan. The government is extremely important in tourism planning and policy formulation as well as implementing policies into practice. In addition, the important role of the government is the promotion of tourism industry in various forms such as finance, training, and infrastructure (Mahajar & Mohd Yunus, 2006; Robertson, Collins, Medeira, & Slater, 2003). The tourism development could not be successful without government support (Hughes, 1984). This is correspondent with Perce's idea (Perce, 1989) suggesting that the government plays a key role in the use of authority to formulate policies for the development of local tourism.

At present, the government has played more active role in planning the tourism development and processes related to tourism especially in terms of tourism's economic returns. This is considered the legitimate income the government receives from taxes on business, creation of business opportunities from tourists, and creation of jobs for people in the community. The government needs to be involved in management for the tourism development plan to achieve continuous and sustainable results (Weaver, 2007). Apart from the duties in initiating and promoting tourism, in another role, the government must also manage and develop tourism personnel to have potential. This includes playing the role of policy maker for tourism, development and planning of events and activities which are varied following each tourist attraction (Baum & Szivas, 2008).

The findings are consistent with the findings of Ruhanen and Weaver (Ruhanen, 2012; Weaver, 2007) that the increasing government's role in tourism development planning and processes are related to tourism especially in regards to tourism's economic returns which are considered legitimate income that the government receives from the taxes on the business. Meanwhile, the tourism development also provides people in the community with economic, social and environmental benefits from creating business opportunities from tourists and creating jobs for people in the community. The government is required to be involved in management to achieve the tourism development plan that has been achieved continuously and sustainably. As the tourism development will inevitably affect communities in one way or another, the performance of government therefore needs supports from the local community (Hanafiah, Jamaluddin, & Zulkifly, 2013).

The role of the government will not only affect the development of sustainable tourism, it will also influence other factors related to tourism development. From the social exchange theory, it can be seen that the communities will respond favorably to or support tourism development plans when they can perceive more outcomes than the negative effects of that tourism. From this reason, the government roles are inevitably associated with communities. Sulaiman, Othman, Samah, Yero, D'Silva, and Ortega (Sulaiman, Othman, Samah, Yero, D'Silva, & Ortega, 2014) studied the community involvement in setting social rules of the community. A part of the study showed the importance of community participation from individual factors, community factors, organizational factors, to government factors joining in regulating the regulation for living altogether of the community. This study demonstrated the holistic participation model and the government roles in initiating and setting policies as well as providing cooperation and communication approaches to make sense to all

sectors which will affect the formulation of rules of the community in the future.

In the same way, the tourism development under the government's initiative contributes to community mobility. However, the implementation in various areas also inevitably affect the perception of both positive and negative impacts on tourism development policies in the economic, cultural, social and environmental aspects (Choi, & Murray, 2010; Dyer, et al., 2007; Lankford, & Howard, 1994; Vargas-Sanchez, et al., 2011) especially in the recognition of benefits from tourism development. This is consistent with the social exchange theory that explains if communities perceive positive impacts that are beneficial to the community rather than the negative impacts of the increasing cost or difficulty in living from community tourism, it will result in more villagers in the community willing to contribute to the development of community tourism (Allen, Hafer, Long, & Perdue, 1993; Ap, 1992; Gursoy, & Kendall, 2006; Gursoy, & Rutherford, 2004).

3) The awareness and involvement of the local community had indirect influence and had the final overall influence on the sustainable tourism development of Nan. The positive cultural awareness plays a very important role in contributing to the tourism development of the local people. This agrees with the findings of Yoon, Gursoy, and Chen (Yoon, Gursoy, & Chen, 2001). It is found that tourism development has a negative impact on social and environmental perception but has a positive effect on cultural and economic perception of local people. In addition, the study of Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, and Vogt (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005), it is found that tourism development creates positive perception of the community in economic and environmental aspects. It also shows that the economic condition of the community is very important to support the tourism development of the people in that community.

Apart from the perception of people in the community to develop sustainable tourism, it is necessary to allow people in the area to take part in solving their problems through the process of thinking and analyzing the situation in which they are present and ready to change when necessary. The development process will take place when the participation of the people is voluntary and people in the community play a major role in the development of community tourism from thinking and analyzing problems and obstacles, taking part in responsibility, evaluating and equitably sharing the benefits gained from community tourism development projects.

The awareness and involvement of local communities influence the perception of impacts from tourism development policies and the benefits of tourism. This is in line with Bennett (Bennett, 2016) proposing the idea of perceptions of the people in the area about the guidelines for conservation of nature in protected areas. This can be classified into 4 types; social impact from conservation guidelines, natural impacts from conservation approaches, correctness according to the principles of conservation, and the acceptance of conservation management guidelines. These make people involved in conservation area management understand the response of the people in the area leading to the planning of conservation policies that are appropriate for the area and the local communities as well as the social exchange theory. The perceived disadvantage of local residents from government conservation plans would oppose programs and activities in conservation as well (Klain, Beveridge, & Bennett, 2014; Pascual, et al., 2014). When considering, it is found that the local community's attitude towards tourism has a profound effect on tourism development. Understanding the community's views towards tourism development in different directions helps those who are involved be able to plan appropriate tourism development whether it is a positive effect that allows the project to be driven at full strength from the support of the people of the community

or negative attitude that forces project administrators and stakeholders to reconsider or revise guidelines for community tourism development (Gunasekaran, White, Sharma, & Dyer, 2009; Williams, & Lawson, 2001). However, the diverse opinion of the community contributes to thought dynamics and promote the management of tourism development in various communities towards good success (Gursoy, et al., 2010; Zamani-Farahani, & Musa, 2008).

Likewise, a community with knowledge of the environment gives importance to the environment around the community, especially natural environment. Several academicians (Gursoy, et al., 2002; 2010; Gursoy, et al., 2009; Gursoy, & Rutherford, 2004; Jurowski, et al., 1997) found that the community with high environmental attitude tends to have relatively low perception of the impact of tourism. In the same way, the communities with high environmental attitude will also be more likely to provide a high level of support for tourism development. This is consistent with the proposed social exchange theory that tourism improves the community's economy in exchange for its social and environmental impacts in the community (Gursoy, & Kendall, 2006; Harrill, 2004). If the community perceives the positive impacts that are more beneficial to the community than the negative impacts of the increasing cost or difficulty of living in community tourism, this will result in more villagers in the community willing to support the development of community tourism (Allen, et al., 1993; Ap, 1992; Gursoy, et al., 2010, Gursoy, & Kendall, 2006; Gursoy, & Rutherford, 2004).

Local residents have the right to express opinions or take part in any project that is useful to themselves and to the community. Cohen and Uphoff (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980) proposed that real participation is participation in the project ever since the decision-making process, participating in the practice, contributing to the benefits as well as participating in the evaluation. It can be said that with the participation of the

community, the local people can understand the problems and obstacles from tourism development policy and equally participating in perception of the benefits that will be received from the tourism development plan. It also plays an important role in assessing the success of the sustainable tourism development in another way.

The strategy for enhancing Thai tourism to benefit the community (community-based tourism (CBT Thailand) of 2018 proposed that in developing tourism to benefit the local community, it was important for the community to be involved from the beginning. However, the challenges that arise in the current situation that prevent communities from participating in tourism development have two main factors; 1) the community does not understand how to enter, why to participate, for what purpose, and where they are in the tourism, and 2) the community does not know how to get involved. The most important thing to overcome those two challenges is to develop the capacity of local communities to have knowledge and skills necessary to participate in tourism whether it is knowing pros and cons of travel management and adding value to local resources, being a good host, realizing the opportunities to connect the community with tourism, etc.

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