DEVELOPMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM BY IMPLEMENTING THE PHILOSOPHY OF SUFFICIENCY ECONOMY IN PHUKET, THAILAND

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Abstract- This paper aimed to investigate relationship of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy factors that associated with the relationship in the eco- tourism supply chain from the upstream, middle stream to downstream sources that affected tourist satisfaction, local community involvement and sustainable development for eco- tourism in Phuket Province**.** The findings the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy provided a wider range of utilities to be adopted in tourism development and policy formulation for sustainability based on the principles of the Philosophy**.** The policy in association with the principle of reasonableness could be referred to a provision of directions for tourist attraction recovery, cultural preservation and promotion of host community involvement**.** Additionally, tourism product diversification and innovation based on the local wisdoms and identities remains one of the critical factors that can build immunity for the local communities and sustainability for the province**'**s eco- tourism**.**

Index Terms- Development, Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, Sustainable Tourism**.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Thailand has benefited from the consequence of being part of the ASEAN Economic Community of AEC, especially in tourism sector. More freedom of traveling in to the country and flexibility in the process produce economic growth in several service units for instance accommodation and restaurants. The year 2015 reported an approximate number of 29.55 million tourist arrivals mostly from China, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan and Laos, and some from European region, generating more than 2.23 trillion Baht. The number was 20.44 percentages increased from the previous years. Moreover, there have been increasingly expansions of low cost airline flight routes to both primary and secondary tourist destinations as to serve the individual and budget travel markets. The integration of Southeast Asian Nations has proved the higher mobility of people traveling, working and trading across the neighboring countries (Thansettakij, 7-9 January, 2016). It has no objection that tourism industry is essential not only in driving the national economic that secures the national stability but also in generating more incomes to local areas, accelerating improvements in many areas including people. In order to sustain this, it necessitates that the country commences to rethink about sustainability of many of its tourism resources through improvements and maintenance of attractions, infrastructures, human resources and other related businesses to gain higher standards, quality and impressions for tourists.

Phuket is one of the southern provinces of Thailand, lying off the west coast of Thailand in the Andaman Sea. It has been ranked to be one of the world-renowned tourist destinations with an array of unique sea attractions and has its high capacity of tourism to the international class. Its ultimate unique selling points include pristine beach, crystalized clear sea water, diversity of islands and eco- tourism activities for instance diving and rock climbing. It has been known as a so called 'the Andaman Paradise' and 'the Pearl of Andaman Sea'. Some islands to boast are Phi Phi Islands, Similan Islands and Surin Islands. It has high capacity in facilitating tourist arrivals due to its readiness in terms of the superstructures for example the international airport and modern port for yacht charters.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Concept of Sustainable Tourism

The concept of sustainable tourism was firstly derived from the universal concern about the environmental health and sustainable use of resources. An international conference on Human Environment in 1972 was initiated by the United Nations (UN), in which the considerations of the world environment and sustainable development were addressed. Later the 1992 international conference contributed to the recommendations of sustainable tourism. The paradigm of sustainable tourism has been evolved in response to problems arising from the rapid growth of mass tourism and heavy uses of the environment (Theobold, 1994). The sustainable tourism development framework was developed by Swarbrooke (1999), which provides applicability for balancing the tourism development, the economic growth and cultural heritage conservation. The term sustainable cultural tourism was therefore defined as

the tourism that generated economic growth while promoting and fostering the wealth of culture and its living community. Sustainable management for cultural tourism requires a perspective of cultural heritage conservation and protection to be evolved along with tourism development. It is necessary the management should present and safeguard the significance of cultural heritage values and promote people's understanding and engagement in cultural tourism experiences through programs that enrich cultural aesthetics and spiritual values. Community learning and participation in cultural tourism also contributes to safeguarding of its art and cultural heritage, its identity and promoting cultural inheritance.

The Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy is the philosophy that stresses the middle path as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct. The concept of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy applies the fundamental principle of Thai culture, which conveys the method of development based on reasonableness, virtue, moderation, social immunity and moderation (Soonthorn Kulwattanaworapong, 2001).

Eco- tourism is another type of tourism that has special characteristics (Thakerngsak Chaicharn, 2013). This type of tourism also applies the concept of sustainable tourism, defined by its alternative tourism activities, mostly associated with natural and cultural ecological system. Visiting national parks and engaging in cultures of groups of people, as some examples, with responsible mind of minimizing negative impacts, are therefore considered an integral part of eco- tourism (Collier and Harraway, 1997). Eco- tourism management centralizes the practices of building environmental awareness, learning, understanding and appreciating the integrity of ecological system and local cultures. Thus, the primary importance is on information management, interpretation and performance of tourist guides. Moreover, host communities are recognized as key player in initiating plans, management, implementations, monitoring and evaluation for their eco- tourism activities, with supports and cooperation of public and private sectors. The tourism activities should also bring back to the host communities benefits in the aspect of economy and quality of well-being, while protecting their natural habitats. There are 5 basic principles of eco- tourism: (1) nature-based tourism, blended with the environmental, ecological and local culture of an area; (2) focusing on ecological sustainable tourism in economic, social and environmental sustainability; (3) tourism activities designed with an emphasis on environmentally educative tourism, that promote fun and meaningful experiences; (4) bringing direct benefits to local communities, which is resulted from efforts to engaging the locals to participate in the tourism initiatives through providing services and facilitation, giving local knowledge and selling local products; and (5) creating tourist satisfaction towards, for example, services, safety and security.

2.2. Tourism Marketing and Supply Chain

Marketing for tourism industry is to prioritize different market segmentations and targeting, through situational and competiveness analyses, planning and marketing strategy formulation. Destination marketing becomes an integral part of the development and management of attractions, destinations, accessibility, infrastructures and facilities, as these are the factors of tourists' decision on destination choice and re-visitation (Middleton and Hawkins, 2001).

Tourism supply chain is a network of individuals or organizations and activities involved in the creation of a tourism product and service from the delivery of source materials from the supplier to the end user or consumer in tourism business (Zhang et al., 2009). The chain encompasses 4 players including suppliers, tour operators, agents and customers, connected in a tourism supply chain. According to Handfield and Nichols (1999), supply chain management is a process of managing tourism and service demands with an integration of value chain management and responsiveness to market needs, production, distribution, delivery, information management and communication. The goal of supply chain management is to reduce costs of production and to increase competitiveness. Thus, the management of supply chain entails business cooperation from upstream to downstream process or from supply sources to customers.

Sustainable tourism supply chain management implies good relationship among different stakeholders in the supply chain and elucidates organizations' conception of sustainability which can be seen from responsible business conducts, quality resource management and concern on environmental impacts. The performance also incorporates effective communication to markets, improving market recognition and responding to market needs. These activities are the key driver in the upstream management with sustainability (Tanapat Sangaroon, 2011). The upstream management elements include (1) ability, (2) attributes of organizations, (3) information flow, (4) cultural values, (5) cooperation of stakeholders and (6) experience in operation. The middle stream of the tourism supply chain is consisted of (1) transportation, (2) accommodation, (3) attractions, (4) activities, (5) ancillary services including sites and events, natural or man- made ones, (6) sales agency as the duties of tour operators, travel

agents or special chandlers. The downstream management elements involve (1) tourist satisfaction that later shapes the ways of sustainable management of tourism destinations with environmental impact concerns, and (2) community involvement in environmental protection and (3) sustainable Tourism

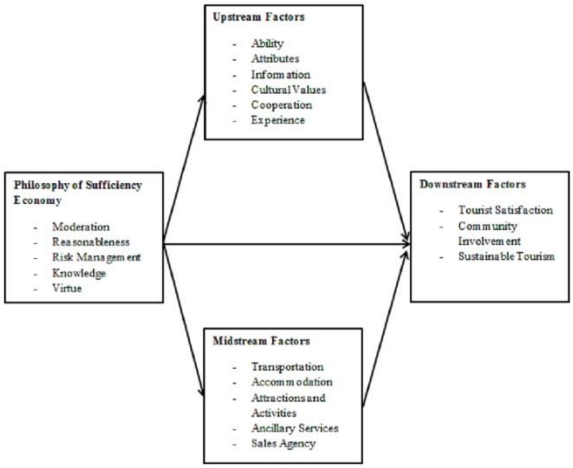


Fig.1. The Conceptual Framework

III. DETAILS EXPERIMENTAL

3.1. Research Methodology

The qualitative approach was employed in this paper. The study aimed to study issues associated with the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, tourism strategy formulation, organizational management of tourism business stakeholders and sustainable tourism. The in-depth interview was conducted with 10 respondents from tourism- related public organizations and companies in tourism and hotel businesses. The scope was on the opinions of the respondents towards an adoption of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy in developing and managing the tourism supply chain from the upstream to the downstream process for sustainability.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were reported based on the analysis of the relationship of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy on the eco-tourism supply chain from the upstream to the downstream process, and its effect on tourist satisfaction and host community involvement in developing responsible tourism of Phuket Province, Thailand. The first section was the evaluation of Thai tourism situation and the second section presented the relationship of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy and the development factors of tourism supply chain for sustainability.

4.1. Tourism Resource Degradation

It was found that many tourist attractions in Phuket had been increasingly facing the poor condition as a result of higher number of tourists. This situation can lead to the lowering quality of destinations and decreased competitiveness, especially when there are more neighboring countries for instance Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia promoting their tourism. It is critical that Thailand expedites policy and implementation of rehabilitation for tourist attractions and instigates laws and regulations.

4.2. Tourism Administration and Management Structure

The study revealed weakness of Thai tourism administration and management structure, a lack of unity and connectivity in the tourism management and development between local, provincial, regional and national levels, and lower level of involvement of private sector and local administrative organizations. Moreover, it was found that the local administrative organizations and host communities have inadequate knowledge of tourism landscape management and development planning. There must be an integration of cooperative working from all levels with identified scopes of works and appropriate development patterns designed for different destinations.

4.3. Vulnerabilities and Impacts of Global Changes on Tourism

The current tourism has been vulnerable to many unpredictable global crises ranging from climate change, natural disasters, diseases spread, economic recession and political instability; all which place a great effect on tourism market confidence. Thailand will require careful and planned actions to encounter these forces, especially in terms of tourism policy and measurements.

4.4. Thailand's Readiness as a Hub of Tourism and Services

Despite several threats Thai tourism has been facing, it was found that the country has still been benefited from being the hub of Southeast Asia and the changing demographic structure, for instance the ageing society. Furthermore, the country has till gained reputation for the international tourism market due to the readiness of the national infrastructure and superstructure for tourism as well as the growing importance of creative economy policy that has become the synergies connecting tourism and service sector with other sectors to increase more values, for example animation film making, computer gaming industries and fashion industries.

The finding of the relationship between the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy and the development factors of tourism supply chain for sustainability presented a high degree of the relationship. This explained that the management related with service provision, and finally contributed to the overall satisfaction of tourists who visited Phuket. Some suggestions were provided in supporting the sustainable development as follows:

4.5. Development of Logistics for Tourism

Transportation system between the primary and secondary towns must be improved by an integration of all kinds of transport modes. The transportation system should ensure the fast, safe and convenient services with cleanliness and meeting the international standards. Local authorities should be involved in improving the transports in their area. Additionally, signage and interpretation should be improved with international standards.

4.6. Development of Tourist Facilities

The local authorities should pay attention to a provision of universal- designed facilities for the disables and old people for instance signs, toilets and slope pathways. As well, there must be development of information and communication technological network that connects with tourism services, to support tourists' traveling.

4.7. Recovery of Tourist Attractions with Direction

In each development planning, there must be concerns on site carrying capacity for the highest usability and longevity. This can be driven by acts of laws and regulations. Moreover, secondary towns can be developed, with careful planning, as the secondary tourist destinations to offer alternatives to tourists, whereas the existing destinations should receive serious recovery actions. Accomplishing these, there will be values along the tourism supply chain intricacies where concerns for environmental, architectural and cultural integrity can be mastered for future uses.

4.8. Diversification of Tourism Products based on Creative Economy

Tourism products should be diversified based on the concept of the creative economy, the national readiness of resources and tourism market needs. Spa, health tourism, adventure tourism, spiritual tourism, MICE, sport tourism, agro- tourism, and tourism activities that cater the elderly or senior and honeymoon tourist markets are some of the suggestions.

4.9. Local- Oriented Tourism Development

The local hosts are very important in tourism. One critical key factor of sustainable tourism development is local people. Some local communities have an ability to conduct their tourism based on the concept and principle of community- based tourism; the concept that can be accompanied with the OTOP model. These can increase positive investment atmosphere down to the locals. Moreover, the local communities' sense of belonging of and pride on their cultural and natural assets can be enriched by getting them involved in tourism planning and development process, so that they help protect their resources and care for the physical environment and the ecology in their area. Additionally, the most important aspect that should also be firstly prioritized is human resource development. Knowledgeable and discerning personnel will be able to apply and implement the established policies into practice with the highest level of effectiveness, efficiency and productivity. Trainings and capability endorsement programs can be initiated particularly in the fields of professional tourist guide and foreign language skills, knowledge of history and cultures of attractions, and of tour business units. Trainings and workshops of special skills for small and medium entrepreneurs must be initiated in order to produce more quality human resources to serve the industry. There must be cooperation of public and private sectors. Additionally, trainings for managerial position should be carried out. These will finally improve the competitiveness of tourism of Phuket.

V. FUTURE STUDY

Future research should apply both qualitative and qualitative methods with domestic and international tourists visiting Phuket, in order that the findings will be used in improvement and development that meet the needs and preferences of the tourist markets of the province and for attracting new tourist market groups in the future. Next study can include other provinces in the same cluster of Phuket or the provinces nearly as the scope of studied areas, in order to investigate relationships and impacts and apply findings to future development of sustainable eco- tourism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank the Research and Development Institute, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand for financial support. Also, the researcher would like to thank Dr. Kevin Wongleedee, Director of Institute of Lifelong Learning Promotion and Creativity for proof reading this research paper.

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