

**APPLYING BUSINESS MODEL AND COOPERATING WITH
STAKEHOLDERS IN COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the application of business model and the cooperation with stakeholders towards the development of community-based tourism. The author used the case study of Mahasawat canal community, which is known as one of the well-established and successful agro-tourism communities in Thailand. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data from the local people participating in the tourism activities. Purposive sampling was used to collect data from 22 local villagers who had different roles in the community-based tourism. From the findings, in order to develop and promote tourism destination, the community applied business model to build and sustain the community-based tourism activities. The results showed that the community has to understand the roles of different stakeholders, providing various types of supports, including facility development, marketing strategy, capacity building and tourism skills. In addition, the community has to deal effectively with numerous issues (e.g. developing new tourism products and promoting the tourism destination) and to integrate the tourism activities and their ways of life to create the balance for the participants. Discussions, conclusions and implications of the research were also provided.

Keywords: Business model, Community-based tourism, and Stakeholders

1. Introduction

In the context of tourism in Thailand, community-based tourism has been known as one of the most important areas of tourism development over decades. Currently, tourism developers support the growth of community-based tourism because there are several advantages for local communities, including economic regeneration, social cohesion and cultural preservation. In order to successfully develop tourism product and services, local communities can also apply and develop the business model in order to help the create the products and services, to sell the products to the right target group of customers or tourists and to improve the quality of the products and services to achieve their expected outcomes.

The trend of community-based tourism has been increased rapidly in terms of tourism development and scholarly works in this area (Russell, 2000; Blackstock, 2005). The main research questions for the current papers are “How can business model be applied in the context of community-based tourism?” and “What are the key roles of stakeholders towards the development of community-based tourism?”. It is interesting to find out the how local people apply the business model to ensure the success of their tourism business development.

Additionally, it is important to understand the relationship between stakeholders and the community as well as their collaboration to promote and to support tourism activities. In addition, the conceptual model can be further created to provide a guideline for tourism development model based on the stakeholder analysis.

2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this current research are two folds. The first objective aims to conduct a qualitative investigation of the business model implications from the viewpoints of the local people participating in community-based tourism about the roles and involvements in the local community in different stages of tourism development. Another objective is to develop the conceptual framework in order to demonstrate the process of tourism development with the roles of stakeholders, especially government and nongovernment organizations.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Business Model

Morris et.al, (2005) noted that there is no generally accepted definition of the term business model. There are many different types and forms of business model, but common characteristics of business model can be concluded as the statement of how an organization selects its customers, defines products and services to provide to its customers, determines its tasks and roles to perform, promotes its offerings to the market, creates value for its customers, and sustains profits (Chesbrough, (2010); Chesbrough & Rosenbloom, 2002); Johnson et.al, (2008) and Slywotsky (1996).

At the operational level, the business model indicates the design of internal and external process for the organization. The emphasis of the implementation of the model is on infrastructure, flow of products and services, resource allocation, knowledge management and logistics management (Stewart and Zhao, 2000).

In order to successfully implement the business model, a firm or an organization requires engaging in interdependent activities involving the firm itself, its suppliers, partners and/or customers (Zott and Amit, 2010).

3.2 Community-based tourism

There are several definitions and variations of the definitions for community tourism and community-based tourism. In addition, Goodwin and Santilli (2009) discovered that there was no agreement about the meaning of community-based tourism. Some important criteria for community-based tourism can be generally defined (Russell, 2000; Blackstock, 2005). Firstly, local people must participate and support the tourism activities. Secondly, the results of community-based tourism have to provide economic benefits for the local people. Thirdly, tourism activities help protecting and supporting the culture, tradition, ways of life and natural resources in the community.

3.3 Characteristics of community-based tourism in Thailand

The emergence of community-based tourism in local Thai communities generally stems from internal factors, including the decline of income sources, the deterioration of natural resources as well as the need to cope with cultural impacts from the influx of tourists (Satarat, 2010). Community-based tourism in Thailand was heavily promoted by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)'s Amazing Thailand Campaign during 1998-1999 with objective to preserve tourism areas to attract quality tourists to visit the country and to stay longer. Khanal and Babar (2007) asserted that community-based tourism offers both opportunities and threats to communities. If the management and capacity building of local communities are not done in parallel, opportunities will be lost and damage will be caused. According to Satarat (2010) in Thailand, community-based tourism has suffered from four major problems, which are low-income generation, uneven income distribution, seasonal fluctuations in tourism-derived income and the ignorance of the failures of community-based tourism. Furthermore, past experiences demonstrate that most local people receive very few benefits from tourism activities managed by outsiders. The local people have been involved in tourism only in selling a small quantity of low cost handicrafts and services; whereas, most of the profits went to the middlemen, especially the outside private tour operators. The income generated from tourism is also subject to seasonal fluctuations. The ignorance of the failure of community-based tourism has also been dangerous for communities that have adopted community-based tourism without any concern and preparation.

3.4 Stakeholder concept and success factors in community-Based Tourism

The concept of stakeholder in tourism development is highly discussed in the community-based tourism literature (Sautter and Leisen,1999).In addition, stakeholders can be defined as persons or groups with rightful interests in activities of another organization (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). Aas et al., (2005) mentioned that stakeholder in the tourism industry can be any person or group, creating a positive or negative impact toward tourism environment and the path of the tourism progress of any tourism organizations. In addition, the collaboration among stakeholders and tourism developers in planning, decision-making and implementing process can result in the success or failure of tourism development.

Several attempts have been made to identify and determine the critical success factors for community-based tourism development by using various approaches. However, according to Tasci et al., (2013) many community-based tourism programs failed due to lack of some critical factors such as tangible benefits and employment creation, benefits from the land, management, marketing and entrepreneurial skills, community involvement and participation, sense of ownership of the project amongst the community members, and the lack of local financial resources or heavy reliance on foreign donors. Additionally, since each community has unique destination characteristics and stakeholders involved, there are no rigid community-based tourism models that can be applied indiscriminately to all communities. Thus, there are some principles for best probability of success and sustainability that community-based tourism should rely on as follow (Tasci et al., 2013):

1. Active planning rather than reactive planning.
2. System of production and consumption (the economic system) adapted to local conditions.
3. High degrees of local participation and control (inclusive of marginal groups) in all stages starting from the planning stage.
4. Responsiveness to the priorities of the communities.

5. Power structure in the population, which is positive and conducive to productivity.
6. Educational system for locals, reconstructing the power structure and increasing knowledge and formal competence.
7. Equity in distribution of income and wealth, avoiding losers and winners (winners usually outsiders, exploiters).
8. Involvement of public authorities to structure government intervention (policy framework reforms) to stimulate more desirable outcomes.
9. Tourism as a supporting industry rather than the only industry.

Community-based tourism success criteria can be identified in many aspects, including community participation, benefit sharing among stakeholders, tourism resource conservation, partnership and support from within and outside community, local ownership, quality of life and tourist satisfaction (Vajirakachorn, 2011).

In addition, community-based tourism development can only be achieved when the community realizes its own potential as a community, fully appreciates its natural and cultural resources, and is empowered to be responsible for driving its own economic wheel in a sustainable manner. However, support from government and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) is still important. Mostly, local communities receive assistance from public agencies, private sectors, NGOs and academic institutions in terms of financial and technical supports.

3.5 Community-based tourism case study - agro tourism in Mahasawat canal community

Mahasawat canal community is known as one of the important agro-tourism sites in Thailand, winning tourism award in 2007 from Tourism Authority of Thailand (The trip packer, 2011). Along Mahasawat canal, there are several attractions that tourists can explore by simply riding a boat for a cruise along the canal to the attractions. There are many attractions along the journey, including the orchid farms, a lotus farm, snack shop by the local housewife center, specializing in making crispy rice cakes, which are also a part of the OTOP (One Tambon One Product). It is also allowed the tourists to participate in by trying to make rice cakes as well (The trip packer, 2011). One of the major highlights for the tourists is to observe the ways of life along this canal that are still peaceful and do not change with the passing times, it is because the people here love a life of simplicity and adhere to the sufficiency economy principles (TK Park, 2011). According to the empirical research by Alungkorn (2002), in the beginning local people involving in agro-tourism development project in Mahasawat canal community were farmers owning the farms with potentials to be developed as agro-tourism sites and the farmers with boats, who were willing to participate in the agro-tourism project. However, the finding by Baitumtip (2007) revealed that the local respondents suggested that the community should develop and get more attentions and supports from government and other organizations. In terms of local community participation, the local respondents mentioned that there should be more opportunities allowing the involvement of local community in planning, managing and operation process. In addition, the related organizations should provide more knowledge about sustainable tourism concept for a comprehensive understanding.

4. Methodology

Qualitative research approach was adopted to collect the data. Purposive sampling was applied to select the villagers who were directly involved with the tourism development and activities. These samples had different roles (e.g. boat driver and farm owner), providing

various dimensions in the tourism development. The author used semi-structured interviews to inquire 22 local villagers who directly participated in the development process of community-based tourism in Mahasawat Canal. The informants provided the information about the roles of stakeholders (e.g. government agencies and other related stakeholders) involving in the creation and continuous development of tourism activities. Regarding validity and reliability of the study, the author applied theory triangulation in developing the research designs, based on multiple studies and theories. All interviews were recorded and strictly transcribed for further analysis.

5. Results

The author conducted the interviews with the local residents participating in community-based tourism activities. Some informants joined the community-based tourism from the beginning and some participated in the later years. The age range of the samples was from 35 to 61 years old. The informants were farmers, farm owners, community leaders, boat drivers and vendors. The contents of all interviews were summarized in this section.

5.1 The Beginning of Community-Based Tourism and Using Ways of Life as the Tourism Resources

The location of Mahasawat canal community is located along the canal where local residents maintain their culture and natural resources. Although roads become the main mode of transportation, many local people own boats and used them to commute. In addition, a majority of local people participated in farming for their ways of lives, supporting the development of agro-tourism in the area. Currently there are about 50 families that participated and registered as members of agro-tourism project.

One of the boat drivers mentioned.

“In the past, the way of life of villagers living near Mahasawat Canal is familiar with water transportation by using their own boats to transport people and agricultural products from their farms. Currently, the water transportation is still the main transportation of many people who live near the canal since the roads are still not reached their places yet. As the government established the fund to develop the tourism in community, I started joining this project when it was started in September 2000 by using my boat as the vehicle to bring the tourists to travel to various tourism spots along Mahasawat Canal. I can generate the additional revenues from joining this tourism project by bringing tourists to travel along Mahasawat Canal”.

Several tourism sites have been developed and promoted as tourism destination, such as lotus ponds and orchid farms. Tourism initiatives were firstly encouraged and supported by the government officers, such as Provincial Agricultural officers and Tourism Authority of Thailand.

One boat driver talked about his reasons to join the tourism project.

“Providing boat service to visitors is a good way to earn extra income when there is a free time, I will serve visitors when I am free, and I am not serving if I am busy. And the attractions sites are not far away from my place, so I decided to be a member of the project immediately when my friend invited me to join in the project”.

One of the attractions in Mahasawat canal is the organic fruit farm. The owner recalled her story.

“Agricultural fruit farming is what my family does for living and the Provincial Agricultural Officer was interested in my farm and believed that this farm has potential to develop as a site for agro tourism in the future. My farm was well organized so I did not need to change much, only putting some name tags”.

“In the beginning there were only visitors in the weekend then a number of visitors increased a lot and the community had visitors visited from only weekend to everyday within a year. In the 3rd year, agro tourism in Mahasawat canal was heavily promoted on press such as TV program and traveling magazine, and attracted a great number of tourists and that was the peak period of agro tourism”.

At the beginning of tourism product development, local people collaborated with their stakeholders to form the ideas about types of tourism products (e.g. sightseeing, boat cruising and organic fruits products) to offer to the tourists. As a community, the local people set up a group of community committees to manage the operations such as the logistics flow for the tourists, parking areas, boat queuing, tour guiding, new tourism product and service development, and acquisition of customer feedback for future improvement.

5.2 The Cooperation with the Stakeholders

Stakeholder participation and involvement are key components for community-based tourism at Mahasawat canal. Establishing a harmonious working relationship among the stakeholders and community enhances the sustainable tourism development for the long run. The community has been supported by Department of Agricultural Extension, Community Development Department, and Mahasawat Subdistrict Administrative Organization in several aspects. Moreover, Ministry of Public Health always arranges the program for people in the community to visit and to learn about the management of other tourism communities. Universities located close to the Mahasawat canal support the community in many aspects, such as nutrition calculation of local products and testing the cleanliness of drinking water.

Many governmental organizations supported the development of the tourism activities in Mahasawat community and helped to support funding to each tourism site in order to develop the tourist facilities, including toilet and pavilion. They also provided the training programs for boat drivers such as how to welcome, treat or deal with the tourists and how to provide the boat safety. Moreover, they helped to promote the tourism in this community as well.

One of the farm owners recalled.

“The Department of Agricultural Extension and Tourism Authority of Thailand asked me to join the tourism project and those government agencies offered the help to establish the tourism facilities in the farm area to serve the tourists”.

The stakeholders had many roles in Mahasawat canal community. One farm owner explained.

“There were several hospitality service training programs and education providing for local people who are directly involve with the agro tourism. The knowledge that I gained from participating to those programs help me develop the farm and I have a better understanding about tourism management”.

5.3 Benefits of Community-Based Tourism

Social and economic benefits and cultural preservation are known as the crucial reasons to adopt the community-based tourism. One informant shared her thought about the benefits from community-based tourism.

“The tourism project brought more cooperation among villagers in the area to develop and improve tourism in their community; for example, the villagers help to eliminate the water hyacinth in Mahasawat Canal to facilitate the transportation of tourist boats in their local community. The owner of water lily farm receives additional revenues from the tourism project about 20,000 Baht a year but this is still not the main proportion of the total revenues of this water lily farm”.

In the community, not all villagers joined the community-based tourism project. At the beginning, there were some conflicts for the member of agro-tourism project and those who were not involved, because of ineffective communication to convey the details and benefits of tourism initiatives. Later, with more communication among local people, social cohesion becomes stronger and relationship among the people is better. Another farm owner explained the social benefits of tourism.

“I found that tourism could help tightening relationship of local people in the community; they are closer and have more frequent conversations on tourism related topics. Local shops, like restaurants, that are not members of the agro tourism project also help providing information for visitors and in return the restaurant could sell more food when more visitors come. Moreover, tourism also helps distributing income to communities, some local people could earn some income from selling goods at attraction sites and I believe that tourism is good for community for now and in the future. Tourism provides opportunities for interacting and meeting new people around the world and that is important for knowledge sharing and could apply that knowledge and comment to develop community to better”.

Additionally, it is not just about economic or social benefits, which are important for the local people, but it is also about their personal joy and pride of their community, when there are tourists visiting their homes. The farm owner shared his opinion.

“The main revenue was from farming business and involving with the agro tourism project was just for personal enjoyment in terms of meeting people from different places, knowledge sharing, and promoting the community.”

5.4 New product development in community-based tourism

When tourism activities were developed and tourism products attracted the local and foreign tourists to the tourism sites, however, every product has its life cycle. Learning from the feedback of the tourists, integrating with the local resources, and delivering the new products or services can support the sustainability of the tourism activities. Therefore, long-term tourism development is also highly important in order to draw the attentions of new tourists and repeat visitors to come to the destination. For the local people and the future of their own tourism development, it is highly important to focus on learning and understanding how to attract the tourists to revisit by maintaining their traditions and cultures and at the same time by creating new tourism products which helps reflecting the new cultural dimension of the community.

One informant discussed about the new development in the community.

“Currently, the community has come up with the new concept for floating market as the new attraction in the Mahasawat Canal. In addition, the local government unit has just received the budget to establish’ the floating market’ in front of this local housewife group center to attract more tourists to this area. With the floating market, we can have another channel to sell more of our agricultural products”.

New product development in the community is expected to generate more revenue for the local people. With the financial support from the local government and other supports from their stakeholders, the local people can effectively build and improve their capacity to meet with the expectation and demand of the tourists.

Table 1 Summary of Types of Stakeholders, Contributions of Stakeholders and Benefits to the Community

Types of Stakeholders	Contributions of Stakeholders	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State-owned Enterprises (e.g. Tourism Authority of Thailand) - Government organizations (e.g. Department of Agricultural Extension, Local government, Ministry of Public Health) - Tourists - Other stakeholders (e.g. Universities and Media organizations (such as televisions and magazines) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial supports - Facilities investments - Career development (e.g. tour guide skills development) - Idea generations (e.g. utilizing the new local culture as tourism product) - Problem solving tools - Networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing incomes - Joy - Learning - Social cohesion - Maintenance of local ways of lives - Continuous Development (e.g. floating market) - Conserving and sharing local wisdom

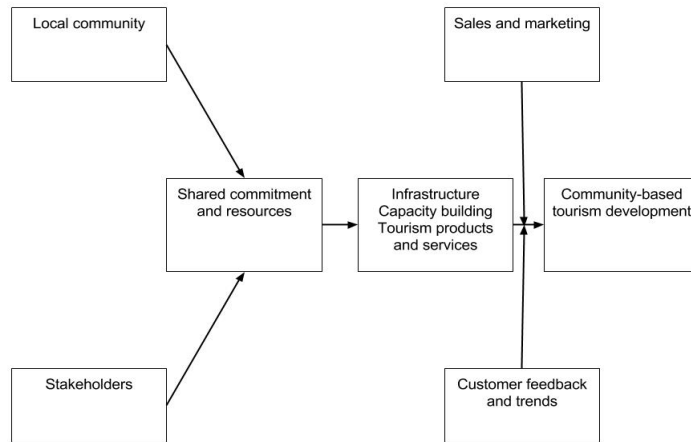
Table 1 summarized the types of the stakeholders from data collection and key contributions to generate the sustainability of tourism activities in the community. In addition, benefits of the tourism development included social, economic, cultural aspects as well as personal enjoyment of the villagers.

6. Discussion

From the results, the community has developed their business model from creating the tourism product, managing the flow of logistics, acquiring new knowledge to continue to deliver new products, and working closely with their stakeholders (Chesbrough & Rosenbloom, 2002; Johnson et.al, 2008).

Stakeholders contributed their resources and commitment to support the community, leading to the success of community-based tourism development. It can be discussed that the relationship between the local community and stakeholders must be harmonious and therefore the community can learn how to become a good host for tourists. Since the beginning of the tourism development, government agencies worked with the local community to create the tourism activities and supported the local people to develop the new tourism product (e.g. the floating market) and the results were supported by Alungkorn (2002), Aas et al., (2005), and Tasci et al., (2013).

Figure 1 Applied business model with the cooperation with stakeholders in Community-Based Tourism Development



From Figure 1, the author summarized business model process and the important roles of stakeholders in supporting the community-based tourism development. With continuous involvement of stakeholders, the relationship with the community leads to shared commitment and resources of all parties. Due to the close collaboration, the community can later achieve capacity building, tourism product development, and learning new tourism skills and knowledge to achieve sustainability in the tourism development.

7. Conclusion

The business model from business organizations can clearly be applied in the context of community-based tourism. Moreover, tourists are also customers for the tourism destination and therefore the community can continue to learn and to improve its marketing and management strategies to improve the tourism products and services to increase the financial returns. Additionally, the roles of stakeholders in community-based tourism are highly essential and, it can be concluded that without the encouragement and support of the stakeholders, there is no tourism activities in the community today. However, it is obvious that the participation of stakeholders is merely a part of the tourism development. The long-term success of tourism initiatives lies on the shared vision of the local people together with the strong integration of the leaders, local people participating, and those who do not want to participate with the tourism activities. Furthermore, keeping balance between their ways of life and roles of tourism providers provides the continuity and sustainability of tourism development in Mahasawat canal community.

About recommendations and managerial implications, the results provided that to successfully develop the community-based tourism activities, the villagers, including community leaders and others, have to be directly involved and try to help one another developing the tourism activities to attract new tourists and to draw the tourists to revisit the destination. In addition, the community should focus on maintaining their originality in terms of culture and way of life and on developing new tourism products to increase the likelihood for the tourists to revisit the destination in the future. Another important dimension is that the

community needs to develop the strong and collaborative with their stakeholders (including public and private sectors), because the stakeholders can provide new knowledge and other important resources for the community.

Some limitation of the study should be mentioned. Firstly, the study was based on the case study of one community in the central part of Thailand. The study of many communities may enhance the generalization of the results. Secondly, there are many different types of community-based tourism, such as agrotourism, adventure tourism and ecotourism, and the factors and environment of each type of tourism can be varied. For further research, since the current study was based on a case study approach, the researchers may study the application of business model in various tourism destinations in order to enhance the dimensions of the business model for community-based tourism organizations. In addition, it is also interesting to explore the long-term relationship between community and stakeholders, especially about the exchange mechanism among all parties involved, including from the point of view of stakeholders and their own goals for supporting the communities. In addition, quantitative approach can be conducted to identify the level of importance of the factors involving tourism development.

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