

Uncontrollable Growth of Commercial Buildings Threaten Sustainable Development : The Case of Phuket and Chang Island, Thailand

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Abstract

Shops, restaurants and bars are tourist facilities. However, uncontrollable growth of improper commercial buildings in tourism areas which are mostly outside urban areas changed natural landscape, exploit natural resource, and affect indigenous culture. This can be seen in Phuket and Chang Island. The government, tourist organizations and academics need to be concerned about the impact of tourism industry. Providing training to operators of tourism business and leaders of local communities as well as local people with knowledge and understanding can prevent exploitation of natural resource in order to preserve their environment, indigenous culture and rehabilitate their livelihood.

It is time for people involved in tourism business to respect sustainable development and make efforts to ensure the right balance between commercialization and conservation.

Keywords : Commercial Buildings, Local Distinctiveness, Natural Environment, Sustainable Development.

This article aims to provide leaders of local communities, stakeholders and authorities with knowledge and understanding, concerning physical environment of commercial area development to prevent exploitation of natural resources and ensure sustainable tourism development.

Forest, mountain, sun, sand and sea are heritage of nature; these places have attractions that tourists want to visit. The more number of tourists, the more investors and employees. These two types of people mentioned may not be all local people, but migrated from other towns and even other countries.

What have been developing in those two areas?

In Phuket, the private sector has been erecting many big department stores and shop-houses. Many parts of the widened roads are lined with shop-houses and electricity poles. Forest and orchards have been replaced by densely crowded buildings.

On Chang Island, the investors built hotels, resorts, vacation houses, shops, bars, restaurants and other tourist facilities. Natural land is being replaced by new buildings and infrastructure such as roads, walk-ways, promenades, water pipes, electricity poles and cables, for example.

Such constructions in those two areas changed the natural landscape, their beauty and charm. (See pictures) When the buildings develop very fast it becomes uncontrollable. Because most of the beautiful natural sites are outside the urban areas, regulations are under the control of heads of districts (Tambol) or leaders of local communities called "Or Bor Tor". Such developments are new to them and progressed faster than the experience that they have.

Phuket and Chang Island are losing their identities because there is no development plan. There is only conservation plan but no incentives such as tax reduction and government fund for implementation of cultural and natural conservation.

Figure 1 The group of crowded shop - houses in Phuket



Figure 2 Shops on Chang Island.



The future of tourism will depend on its ecological sustainability. It may not be too late for Phuket and Chang Island if local communities and authorities understand sustainable development and local distinctiveness which is the relationship between environmental quality and economics.

What is sustainable development?

“The paradigm of sustainable development which typifies and characterizes the environmental conscience of the current era, appears indisputable. It suggests that proposed tourism developments should have economic advantages, create social benefits for the local community and not harm the natural environment. These goals should apply not only to the present generation, but to future generations as well.” (Stuart McMinn, 1997)

“Sustainable development was first discussed in the 1960s with the advent of the green movement and the term came into common parlance with the publication of the report by the World commission on Environment and development (1987) (entitled *Our Common Future*) It was given further recognition with the United Nations sponsored conference on the environment held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The meaning, based on the Brundtland report, is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

“Sustainable development incorporates social, economic and environmental objectives. An understanding of social, economic and environmental capital is required, that is to say, the combination of physical quality of life with economic well being and personal attributes of health, self-esteem, skills and knowledge. Indeed, government policy in this area accepts that sustainable development covers a very wide range of objectives and indicators. To achieve objectives like the need to build sustainable communities many different policies and goals must be integrated, ranging from the physical quality of what is built to the social and economic well being of those who will live there.” (Michael Stubbs, 2004)

“A holistic stance on sustainability is perhaps inevitable due to the combination of environmental, social and economic objectives involved. The Key challenge will be to ensure that such general ideas permeate into operational heritage management” (Strange & Whitney, 2003).

“Sustainability is more than just about physical resources. It is also about community and culture” (English Heritage, 2002) Facets of sustainability, namely is social, economic and environmental dimensions.”

This sentiment is seen in the writing of Ramsamy (1992), who emphasized that policy measures are needed with respect to the preservation of the natural environment.

“Even in terms of the site-specific location for the proposed tourist development, what level of environmental modification is acceptable and what is being protected? The decision regarding at what level or stage the environment should be sustained will undoubtedly differ with each specific situation and depend on the interest group or person that is asked.” (Ramsamy, 1992) “The fact that the environment should be sustained, at least in part, to sustain tourism.” (Manning, 1993) The long term viability of the tourism industry is dependent on maintenance of natural, cultural and historical attractions

“Tourism may in fact be the true salvation of humankind’s cultural heritage. After all, it’s the main countervailing force to internationalization-that is, the global blah of TV, T. shirts, tract housing, fast-food chains business suits, malls and brand names . Internationalization has, impracticely, been a process of everyone’s coming to live and act the same; the Japanese gave up their kimonos because they were considered “unmodern”, while Beijing destroyed its old city for the same reason. But tourists are looking for something old and something different and they pay for it.” (Alex Kerr, 2006)

Reviewing the ideas

Sustainable tourism is tourism which can be sustained over the long-term because it results in a net benefit for the social, economic, natural and cultural environments of the area in which it takes place.

We have to try to prevent what could be preventable. Large areas of commercial areas especially shop - houses without proper design damage the delicate environment. Developing good services, safety and upgrading tourist attractions are vital for the continuing success of tourism industry. At the same time, conservation and preservation of natural and cultural heritage must be maintained to conserve local uniqueness.

The government, academic institutions, universities, relevant organizations, agencies have to pay attention to impact of tourism industry. Undertake research and provide training to operators of tourism business and leaders of local communities. Provide local communities with knowledge and understanding to prevent exploitation of natural resources, to preserve their environment and indigenous culture and rehabilitate their livelihood.

Today, Phuket and Chang Island need proper attention in terms of conservation and development planning in sustainable ways . City regulations and building codes have to be revised and strictly enforced. Landuse, density and

openspace have to be reconsidered. If the local authorities and persons responsible do not realize about natural heritage and ignore sustainability allowing urban growth without constraints and proper planning, Phuket will crumble in the near future, and tourist will change to other destinations.

In conclusion, although tourism is an important sector of the communities and economies. Tourism creates jobs and maintain a healthy competitive edge. It is also a very sensitive business. Some impacts of tourism are challenges and threats to some indigenous cultures and damage the environment. Therefore, people involved in tourism development have to take precautions and extra care to preserve indigenous cultures and fragile environment because these heritages are not replaceable.

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