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The Use of Traditional and Cultural based for Sustainable local Development : A Case of Development Management Guidelines of the Traditional Boat Racing in Nan, Thailand¹

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Abstract

This article arose from a preliminary study of a doctoral study entitled “The Development of Community Innovation for the Creative Health Promotion: A case of the traditional boat racing in Nan, Thailand. The objectives of the study were: 1) to adjust the thinking process of the people who socially participated creative traditional boat racing; 2) to develop management guidelines of the traditional boat racing in community creatively and with community participation. The 40 sample included the leaders of traditional boat racing, boat racing crews and cheer leaders. Each informant had at least 4 years of experience in boat racing. The sample were selected purposively from 64 villages. Data were collected using open3ended interviews, seven focus-group discussions, and in3depth interviews done with 20 sample. The analysis of data done using descriptive and content analyses. The results are as follows:

The management of learning process with participation of all three sample groups resulted in the modification of thinking process of the informants in three content areas: 1) The goal of fierce competition to gaining a victory and passing down community tradition and culture to later generations. 2) The setting up and development of youth’s boat racing crew members were done in order to prepare them for accepting of such boat racing in their community, and 3) A key element in managing the traditional boat racing was to reduce further crisis by focusing on human elements. For development strategies of management guidelines of traditional boat racing in the community, the study found: 1) Building recognition and joint awareness leading to participation in the management of the traditional and creative boat racing and resolving the crisis occurred. 2) Building a joint agreement leading to a joint commitment of mental, physical and social support; and 3) Setting up a joint operation plan based on community needs.

As for suggestions, authority or agencies at local level should provide opportunity to various social groups to be responsible for problem solving directly and have a role in managing local culture; carrying out learning activities and enhancing social energy based on real community needs, diversity of contextual environment, and development process of community culture for good health using traditional and cultural base.

Keywords: Traditional and Cultural Base, Sustainable Local Development, Development Management Guidelines, Traditional Boat Racing

1. Introduction

The traditional boat racing of Nan province, Thailand was a kind of the place - based community innovation that highlighting the cultural unique valuable of race boat through the Great Naga race boat. Every race boat in Nan showed original head-prow and tail of Great Naga which call “Hua-Oh” and “Hung-Wan”. This symbolic function has been displaying through many material and abstract occurrences. For this reason, the traditional boat racing in Nan has a long history of a folk custom for more than 200 years.

Numerous local residents have been involved in the traditional boat racing. There was a strong ancient belief that Great Naga was a supernatural power god who could give sufficient rain for a period of time. Therefore, the villagers needed to took Great Naga race boat on the river when they confronted droughty period. The Great Naga on race boat represented the peaceful and tranquilizing land. At community level, the local residents worshiped Great Naga at all forms, and the boat racing was the one of its. (Committee of Nan Unique, 2006; Nan Province, 1997; Rachain Kurbkum, 2006; Yuthaporn Naksuk, 2009; Sanguan Choksukawat, 1962). In the past, the community had an ancient’s imagination of the relationship between the legendary Great Naga and the Great Naga boat. The floating of the boat on the water represented the image of the Naga. As showed in the ancient document: “the overall effect of the

decorative pieces is impressive, and from a distance the boat looks indeed like a Naga swimming in the river (Richard B.Davis,1984)”.

Furthermore, the main characteristic of traditional boat racing in the Nan province was the close competition. There is a heavy focus on preserving the cultural aspects as the teams consist of only participants from local villages in the Nan province. This makes it different from other traditional boat races in other parts of Thailand. There were many levels of open competitions, such as local, national and international. Some activities changed to marine sports and the boat racing became popular in other foreign countries. races such as “The Oxford-Cambridge Boat Racing”, “The Harvard-Yale Regatta” , “The Dragon Boat Festival” and “The Dragon Boat International Championship” came into existence. In conclusion, the boat racing is a very serious competition from the villages of Nan to countries all over the world.(Rattanaporn Thongkiew,2010)

Nowadays, the traditional boat racing takes place every year during September and October or November depending on a level of water in Nan River. Many people are happy participated in the boat racing and related activities. During the last decade, the boat racing became popular among locals residents and tourists. However, this cultural relativity became recently a critical situation such as too competition and increasing conflict among boat racing teams and organizer teams. Furthermore, the author found from the preliminary study that various forms of conflicts of interest, competitiveness, and the emergence of destructive values have become common. These critical situations have been increasingly serious which displayed the result of destructive culture emerged from the boat racing too serious competition (Rattanaporn Thongkiew, 2009-2010).

2. Objectives

This article had two objectives. First, it aimed to adjust the thinking process in driving the traditional boat racing to be organized in a creative way for promoting a more creative traditional boat racing. Second, it searched for solution and practical mechanism as well as a better development process for the contemporary traditional boat racing.

3. Research Methodology

The qualitative approach was employed as well as a participatory action research (PAR). The participants were divided into 3 groups namely the leaders, the crew and cheer leaders whose teams participated in the race. The author first brought 4 major impacts which resulted from the conclusion of documentary research and preliminary study. Then, 3 social actors by 40 participants from one target village were purposive selected from 64 villages. Then, the author investigated in-depth information by including 7 focus groups discussion, 20 cases in-depth interview, participant and non-participant observation. Last, the author used participatory learning appraisal (PLA) in 3 academic workshops to adjust the thinking process and searched for solution. These included the socio-cultural changes, economic, and health impacts. Furthermore, she searched for practical mechanism as well as a better development process for the improving contemporary traditional boat racing. The data was later analyzed by using narrative analysis and content analysis.

4. Results

The boat racing has increasingly become popular among locals residents as much as those among tourists. This alteration led to a critical situation. The roots of confliction were changing the goal of boat racing to a serious competition which focusing on a material reward placed by related organizations. In order to be the winner, some race boats were using various techniques and spending more budgets to prepare their race boat.

The author highlighted that;

1. The adjustment of thinking process in the traditional of boat racing had 3 elements. These included

- 1.1 Reconsidering the replacement of the goal of competition by encouraging traditional boat racing which were in the form of cultural preservation. Instead of serious competition for winning, the new form of racing increased a cooperative network as well as strong sense of community belonging;

1.2 Inheritance of the cultural community by team building of the young crews groups for preserving cultural community;

1.3 Focusing on healthy racing by inviting three social actors and involving stakeholders. Instead of focusing on recruiting new crews, hiring outside coaches and repairing race boats.

2. There were three strategies solutions, practical mechanism of solving as well as a better development process into the contemporary traditional boat racing: These included

2.1 Using creative adult participatory learning to increasing recognition and awareness of negative impacts among social actors.

2.2 Introducing located new mind set based on creative culture.

2.3 Establishing new regulation for target community based on community cultural identity, local awareness and demand.



Picture 1 : Shows the original designation of the Great Naga Race Boat namely “Kum-Dang-Dhavee” which had been building since 1837 (167 years ago) in the traditional boat racing in Nan Province, Thailand.
(picture by Rattanaporn Thongkiew, 2013).



Picture 2 : Shows the reflection the abstract unique through activities such as at community level, the local residents worshiped Great Naga at all forms, and the boat racing was the one of its. Thai blessing ceremony to the group 'crew that gave precedence to moral support, good luck and thankful for their Sacrificeable. (picture by Rattanaporn Thongkiew, 2012).



Picture 3 : Shows the reflection the abstract unique through activities such as the sense of cultural belonging, and strength of social network among villagers. (picture by Rattanaporn Thongkiew, 2012).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The article concluded that, the participatory learning appraisal (PLA) of the three social actors increased the community's sense of belonging. By focusing on the unique feature of the Great Naga race boat, the cultural unique valuable of race boats were preserved. Moreover, it helped increasing the spiritual engagement, cheerfulness and cooperative network among local villages and involving of stakeholders. Although the boat racing teams from poor villages had been discouraged and upset from their defeat, they were able to maintain their spiritual engagement.

The dramatic changes in terms of definition, goal and management process brought 4 major impacts to involving actors, including the loose of traditional race boat design, reducing the sense of belonging and the strength of community. The author highlighted the current situation of conflicts, gambling and intensive boat racing

as destructive culture. To empower stakeholders and involving social actors, who were proprietorship of their community culture this situation needed to be changed. 3 elements for adjustment of thinking process among the traditional of boat racing included three strategies solutions, practical mechanism of solving as well as a better development process into the contemporary traditional boat racing. Without rethinking about the traditional boat racing, the creative culture was rarely happened. Baumol (1990) supported that how the involving actors acted at a given time and place depend heavily on the rules of the game. Thus, it was the set of rules, the nature of their objectives, the changes in the rules and other attendant circumstances can modify the innovation to destructive influences. Without planning the mind set of involving social actors nor well designation in terms of the rules of the game, the traditional boat racing could become the destructive culture for local community. It provided not only short term negative impacts such as accidents, alcohol consuming, gambling, debts and conflicts, but long term weakening community power.

6. Suggestion from Research

The author expected that the capability of social actors would be strengthened and problems of destructive culture would be declined. The study synthesized a better alternative development by promoting healthy sport based on participatory concern. Local recognition and empowering creative thinking process among involving social actors were established. This would be beneficial development for local communities as well as those visitors and tourists. To promote traditional boat racing as the creative culture, the author highlighted cultural practices based on creative and sustainable development. By this, the local administrative government became recognized as the new form of traditional boat racing. This emergence started from the policy level to the practical one. In fact, the strong sense of belonging and outstanding identity of Nan residents played the most crucial part. This case study exhibited a power of the “good example” which offered social development strategy for bringing Nan province to a healthy lifestyle based on creative culture. The author highlighted healthy boat racing for tourist industry as a better form of creative socio-economic development.

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