

Dynamics of Conflict and Cooperation in Sustainable Tourism Development in Tribal Community of Northern Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted primarily to determine the management dynamics of conflict and cooperation in tourism development in tribal people. The objectives were to describe the processes involved in internal conflict and cooperation and its management, and determine and analyze the type of conflict and cooperation among members within the community. Ban Ruammit was selected as a sample of tribal community which has contributed to tourism development in the Northern Thailand. A total of 140 samples were purposively selected and served as respondents of this study. Data were gathered through individual and focused interviews, and secondary sources of information. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the data analyses. Result showed that conflict among members in the tourism activities was generally low, while cooperation was within the level of moderate. Type of conflict is more of an interpersonal type, whereas type of cooperation of local community was mostly of informal type, which was common in rural organizations. Factors such as main occupation, length of residence, length of group membership, gross annual family income, interdependency, social sensitivity, ascendant tendency, dependability and government assistance had relationships with level of conflict. While, interdependency, dependability, satisfaction with the existing sustainable tourism, cultural sensitivity, and sharing in benefits from natural resources were related to level of cooperation.

Key words: conflict, cooperation, tourism, hilltribe

INTRODUCTION

Conflict describes a situation in which persons or groups disagree over means or ends, and try to establish their views in preference to others. Conflict arises when domains are established and expanded, or when they are defended against erosion or attack. It may also emerge when people experience dissatisfaction or frustration, and it frequently

produces anxiety and tension (McFarland, 1979). Kelley (1987) stressed that some conflict is convert, that is, a person may perceive interference but not express it.

Problems could occur, which can be dysfunctional to the attainment of group or organization objectives. Although each member has the same roles to undertake, conflict is inevitable because certain conditions could bring about conflict before

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and during the implementation of the activities. These could be scarcity and control of resources, misperceptions, incompatibility of working relationships or networking processes. The interactions of these elements could negate the desired organizational output and outcomes.

In reality, conflict does not necessarily mean there is a problem in effective management or breakdown in organizational efficiency. Whenever individuals with varying needs, values and personalities come together within an organizational structure, conflict is inevitable. Conflict, however, is not necessarily destructive; some conflict may be desirable for promoting change and growth. Depending on a leader's response to conflict, the outcome may help or stifle group and individual growth (Kinard, 1988).

Protected areas are refuges of tranquility and peace, aside from the lack of local participation, yet they are also places where conflict occurs. In a world in which the bio-physical environment and socio-cultural systems are changing rapidly, conflicts involving protected areas are inevitable (Lewis, 1996). It can be argued that tourism is one of the major determinants of the value of protected areas. But the role of tourism in expanding public support for protected areas is a source of much debate. Conflict stems from the desire to both preserve natural settings and to allow people access to them (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996).

Ban Ruammit as one of the tourism destinations in Northern Thailand is the tribal village which consists of multi-tribes such as Karen, Lahu, Akha, Homong, etc., therefore, conflicts often occurred in internal community.

This study is trying to uncover the dynamics of conflict and cooperation of tribal community in sustainable tourism development. Specifically this study sought to answer the following questions: a) how are conflicts and cooperation manifested? How conflicts were managed/resolved, and what the consequences of conflict in the tourism development?

Objectives of the study

Specifically the study aimed to 1) determine and analyze the type of conflict and cooperation

within the community, and 2) identify the consequences of conflicts and cooperation of tourism activities

Theoretical framework

A group as a network of people have intentionally invested part of their personal decision making power in the authority of a larger social unit in pursuit of mutually desired but separately unobtainable goals (Mabry and Barnes, 1980). Northcraft and Neale (1990) also stressed that a group is an organized system of two or more individuals who are interrelated so that the system performs some function, has a standard set of role relationships among its members, and has a set of norms that regulate the function of the group and each of its members.

Conflict and cooperation are two conditions of groups which can occur together in the same situation. Tjosvold and Dreu (1997) conclude that people in cooperation tend to understand conflicts as mutual problems to solve. They discuss their opposing ideas, explain their position, and try to integrate their ideas and work to a mutually acceptable solution (Tjosvold and McNeely, 1988).

Therefore, the structural-functional theory as a theoretical perspective is basic in this research problem. This theory supports that cooperation and conflict as part of group dynamics. O'Sullivan et al., (1986) define that Functionalism/Structural Functionalism is a theoretical perspective that views a society as integrated, harmonious, cohesive 'wholes' or 'social systems', where all parts ideally function to maintain equilibrium, consensus, and social order. Rather like an organism or body, societies are analyzed in terms of their constituents parts, or 'subsystems', all of which have to function efficiently if the overall 'health' and well being of the organism or society are to be maintained. Vago (1980) states that the word "structure" generally refers to those consequences of any social activity that make for adaptation or adjustment of a given structure or its components parts. In other words, "structure" refers to a system with relatively enduring patterns, and "function" refers to the dynamic process within the structure. The structures are the various parts of the

social system.

Working in the group constitute a social interaction where each individual influence one another. As a structure the group develops a stable pattern of relationships among members. According to Forsyth (1990) although a wide variety of terms can be used to describe such structures, three of the most useful are roles, norms, and inter member relations. Roles are the behaviors expected of persons who occupy given positions in the group. Norms are the rules that identify and describe appropriate behaviors. Lastly, inter-member relations can be based on many factors such as authority, attraction, and communication, but all are similar in that they link members to one another.

As a function, the group has a dynamic process within the structure. Forsyth (1990) mentions that groups tend to be active, energized, vibrant and changing. The pervasive emphasis on the term dynamics in the study of group behavior implies many things about groups and their study, including the existence of (1) interdependence as a group phenomena; (2) developmental process that begins with a conglomeration of individuals but ends with the formation of a group; (3) changes in groups over time; and (4) sequences of stability, disruption and desolation.

Interpersonal conflict is most pertinent to the perspective of communication and the group process. But interpersonal conflict does not necessarily imply a personality conflict between individuals. Interpersonal conflict is directly observable through sequences of communicative behaviors performed by members of the group. Behavior performed by two or more members' conflict with one another (Fisher, 1981).

Conceptual framework

Cooperation is the action on the part of individual, or groups directed toward a single effect or toward the achievement of a common purpose. On the other hand, conflict is the direct and open antagonistic struggle of persons or groups for the same objective or end. The aim of the conflict is the annihilation, defeat, or subjection of the other

persons or group as a way of obtaining the goal.

In brief, the study focused on the dynamics of conflict and cooperation of local community in sustainable tourism development. Factors were considered influencing conflict and cooperation as described in Figure 1.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Ban Ruammit, Mae Yao Subdistrict, Muang District, Chiang Rai Province, Northern Thailand. This village was selected as a sample of tribal community which has involved in tourism development in the Northern Thailand. It is located along the Mae Kok River in Chiang Rai Province of Northern Thailand, 17 kilometers away from the provincial capital.

The unit of analysis is the local people in Ban Ruammit. Purposive sampling technique was used. The respondents selected from members of tourism activity group for at least two years. The total number of samples was determined using Yamanec's formula (1973). The total number of members of activities is about 200. Using a margin of error of 5 percent, the sample size will be computed to be 133 respondents. To be more accurate, the study used 140 respondents.

A structured interview schedule was designed and used as research instrument to elicit appropriate responses. It consists of socio-demographic and economic characteristics of respondents, their social-psychological characteristics, political factors, and information on level conflict and cooperation among members. The interview schedule was prepared in English and translated into Thai language, and finally into Northern Thailand dialect during the actual interview. Rapport before and during the interview was established by the researcher and the interviewers to avoid apprehension from the respondents. Data were analyzed and presented through frequencies, percentages, means, range and standard deviations. Chi-square test and Spearman rank correlation was employed for testing the relationships among variables.

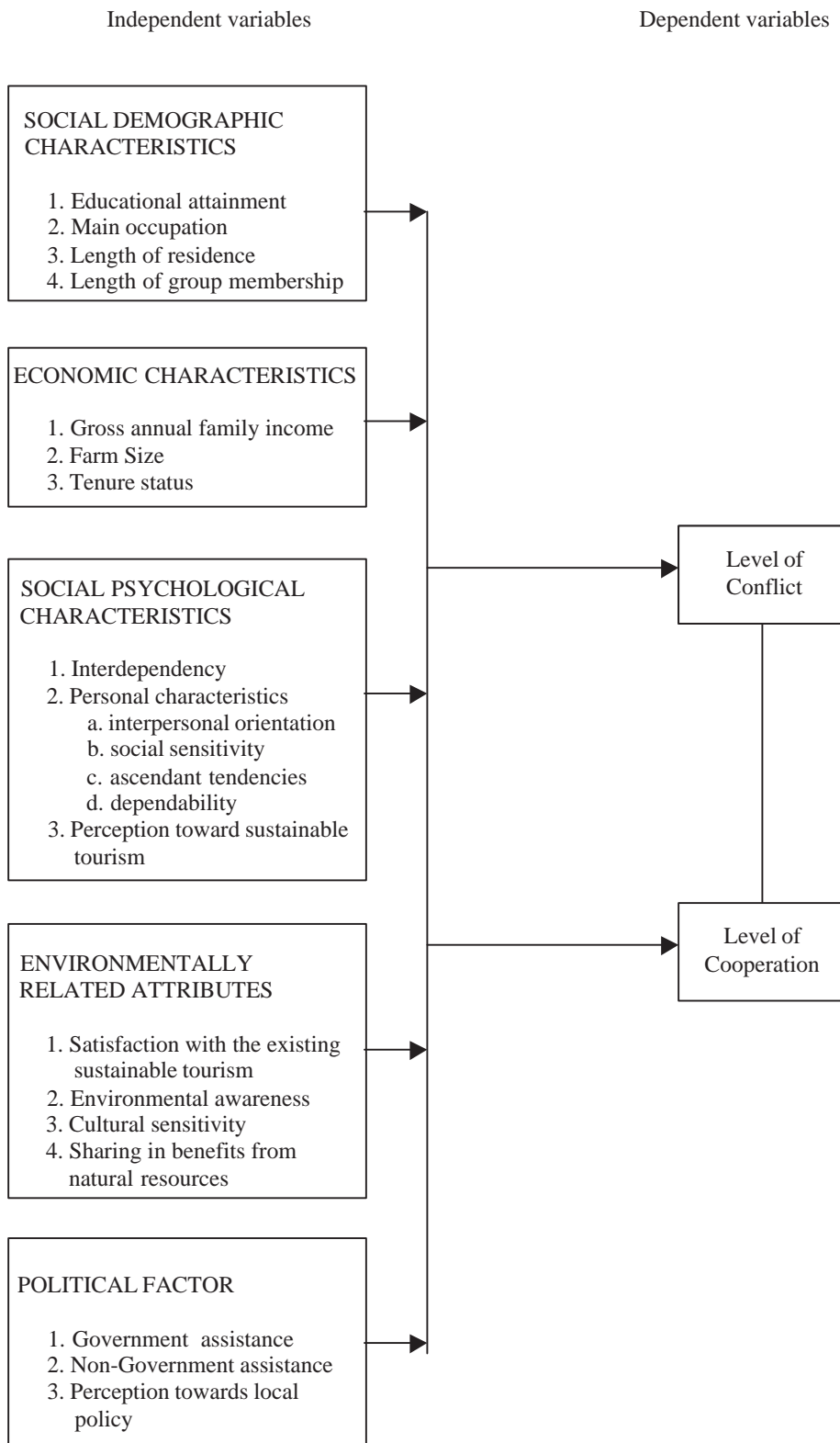


Figure 1 Conceptual framework showing the expected relationship among variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The dynamic nature of the group ensures continual change, but along with change come stresses and strains that surface in the form of conflict. Although in rare instances group members may avoid all conflict because their actions are perfectly coordinated, in most groups the push and pull of interpersonal forces inevitably exert its influence (Balano, 1998). All systems of social control have to deal with the fact that conflict may occur (Miller, 2004). Conflict can occur at any social level, from the most private micro-level of the household to the public, mass situation of all-out warfare.

Conflict in Ban Ruammit community was only simple unlike in cases wherein a group sometimes follow the course of conflict which is initiated by disagreement, confrontation, escalation, de-escalation, resolution, and routine group interaction. Table 1 present a summary of the conflict cases, their causes and type, resolution methods adopted by the members of community, status and the consequences thereat.

Level of conflict

The discussion would focus on interpersonal conflict. Interpersonal conflict encompasses a wide range of behavior. At the most micro-level, the household, interpersonal disputes are common. Beyond the household, interpersonal conflict occur between neighbors and residents of the same village of Ban Ruammit, but there was no written evidence from the villagers or local leaders with what they have happened. The study limited on some activities in tourism.

Conflict cases are evident in the tourism development in Ban Ruammit activities (Table 1). However, it occurred in some activities and not in all the groups. Level of conflict among members of community are typical of the activities undertaken in the operation of the group which involved the following: trekking-elephant, selling souvenir, home-made activities, long-tail boat, cattle maintenance,

pig maintenance, fishery, use of forest (forest management), plantation (rice, vegetable, corn, etc.), promotion, and organizational role. Low level of conflict occurred in most of activities. However, there were few respondents who felt that some activities such as trekking-elephant (11.4 %), selling souvenir (8.6 %), home-made activities (2.1 %), long-tail boat (2.9 %), cattle maintenance (0.7 %), pig maintenance (0.7 %), use of forest (1.4 %), agricultural plantation (6.4 %), and promotion (1.4 %) had intensive level of conflict.

Causes of conflict

Table 1 shows that the causes of conflict in the tourism activities were due to limitation of animal feed or area of feeding, conflict of interest among members, conflict of interest within the group, conflict of interest within community, conflict of role in the organization, conflict of leadership, conflict in payment of due/fee, and weakness of sanction.

Type of conflict

Type of conflict in the tourism activities were classified as interpersonal conflict within the group, role conflict, and combination of role and task conflict.

Interpersonal conflict. This type of conflict was characterized by conflict between two members, or among members. It was commonly evident in most of tourism activities in Ban Ruammit.

Conflict within the group. This occurred between individual members or some members with the group leader or committee such as selling souvenir, promotion, and use of forest.

Role conflict. This type of conflict was manifested in the activity of long- tailed boat.

Combination of role and task conflict. This type of conflict was apparent in operation/activity of elephant and organizational management.

Management strategies/resolution of conflict

In resolving conflict, the following strategies/ resolution methods were adopted by members in the group:

Table 1 Summary of conflict cases, their causes and type, conflict management/resolution adopted and consequences.

Conflict situation	Level of conflict and percentage	Causes of conflict	Types of conflict	Conflict management/ resolution	Status of conflict	Consequences
Trekking-elephant	Intensive (11.4%)	Limited feed, and	Combination of	Problem solving	Still existing	Improving the
	Moderate (27.1%)	destroying plants	role and task	(group discussion)		regulation
	Low (61.4%)	during trekking	conflict			
Selling souvenir	Intensive (8,6%)	Conflict of interest	Interpersonal	Reorientation and	Have been	Members were
	Moderate (40%)	among members	conflict,	compromise	solved	independent to decide
	Low (51.4%)		conflict within the group			the price of products
Home-made Activities	Intensive (2.1%)	Interest within the	Interpersonal	Reorientation and	Have been	Decided the same price
	Moderate (31.4%)	group	conflict	compromise	solved	for the same product
	Low (66.4%)					
Long-tailed boat	Intensive (2.9%)	Conflict of interest	Role conflict	Compromise	Still existing	Improving regulation
	Moderate (30.7%)	among members				
	Low (66.4%)					
Cattle Maintenance	Intensive (0.7%)	Limitation on feeding	Interpersonal	Problem solving	Still existing	Improving regulation
	Moderate (30%)	area	conflict	(group discussion)		
	Low (69.3%)			and compromise		
Pig maintenance	Intensive (0.7%)	Conflict of interest	Interpersonal	Compromise	Have been	Improved regulation
	Moderate (30.7%)	among members	conflict		solved	
	Low (68.6%)					

n = 140

Table 1 (Continued).

Conflict situation	Level of conflict and percentage	Causes of conflict	Types of conflict	Conflict management/ resolution	Status of conflict	Consequences
Fishery	Intensive (0.0%) Moderate (31.4%) Low (68.6%)	Conflict of interest within the group	Interpersonal conflict	Problem solving (group discussion)	Still existing	Demoralizing members tojoin the group and the operation of fishery was stopped temporary
Use of forest (forest management)	Intensive (1.4%) Moderate (37.1%) Low (61.4%)	Conflict of interest within community	Role conflict	Reorientation and use of authoritative command	Still existing	More intensive information and communication
Plantation (rice, vegetable, com, etc.)	Intensive (6.4%) Moderate (30.7%) Low (62.9%)	Lack of information, Conflict of interest among members	Interpersonal conflict	Reorientation	Have been solved	Improve the group dynamics
Promotion	Intensive (1.4%) Moderate (25.7%) Low (72.9%)	Conflict of role within organization	Role conflict	Problem solving (group discussion)	Still existing	Improve the role of members in promotion
Organizational Management	Intensive (0.0%) Moderate (30%) Low (70%)	Conflict of leadership, payment of due/fee and weakness of sanction	Combination role and task conflict	Use of authoritative command	Still existing	Improved the community dynamics, and group regulation

n = 140

Problem solving. This kind of conflict resolution was done in the form of dialogues and group meetings/discussions involved more than two members and employed more on general issues which are easily solved during group meeting.

Reorientation. This training and information campaign about tourism to promote cooperation among members in all activities in tourism under the leadership of local government or private institution.

Compromise. Compromise agreement was used to resolve conflict among members depending on the degree of offense committed by the conflicting persons. A third person served as mediator in settling conflict, such as the group leader, pastor (missionary), or by another member.

Use of authoritative command. This method of resolution of conflict was done on conflicts resulting in non-conformity to their roles or obligation such as payment of dues/fee.

Status of conflict

Conflict cases related to activities such as trekking with elephant, long-tailed boat, cattle maintenance, fishery, use of forest, promotion, and organizational management were still existing. On the other hand, cases related to conflict such as selling souvenir, home-made activities, pig maintenance, and agricultural plantation have already been solved.

Consequences of conflict

Conflict is both functional and dysfunctional to the overall management of a project (Robins, 1976). It is functional because after conflict existed, it can change and improve the attitude of the members and the leader towards the management of the organization and improve the group's enforcement of the rules or regulations. Consequences of conflict also become meaningful in the context of the tourism management particularly in the relationships and member's mutual participation in the attainment of the group's objectives. On the other hand, conflict can be also dysfunctional, in the sense that it can demoralize the members to join the group.

Conflict in Ban Ruammit was generally low and at moderate level, so that they did not become destructive to the community. Stoner and Wankel (1987) concluded that moderate level of conflict have far greater potential for desirable outcomes than higher levels. With moderate conflict, the rival person of group, are more likely to learn to interact in constructive problem solving. Conflict observed in the Ban Ruammit tourism activities were generally more of emotional than physical struggle among the members in vying for the same resources, activities, or goal.

Type and level of cooperation

The type and level of cooperation in Ban Ruammit are reflected on the intensity of cooperation among the members on the various activities performed by the members, which enhance the continuity of the operation and functions of the group in the management of tourism development. All levels of cooperation done in the activities of tourism development were of informal cooperation type. The informal cooperation type can be found in simple societies particularly in the rural area (Bertrand, 1973), and characterized as spontaneous and involves mutual give and take.

Table 2 shows the activities involved in the operation of tourism activities and their level of cooperation. Selling souvenir and agricultural activities were at high level of cooperation, 37.1 percent and 49.3 percent, respectively. Trekking with elephant, home made activities, long tailed boat, cattle raising, pig raising (piggery), fishery, use of forest, promotion and organizational role were at moderate level of conflict.

Relationship between conflict and independent variables

Based on statistical analyses, the study showed that there were significant relationships between level of conflict and independent variables (Table 3 and Table 4), i.e. main occupation ($\chi^2=10.477$, $p\leq.01$, $\Phi=0.299$), length of residency ($r=0.240$, $p\leq.01$), length of group membership

($r=0.224$, $p\leq.01$), gross annual family income ($r= -0.182$, $p\leq.05$), interdependency ($r=0.249$, $p\leq.01$), social sensitivity ($r=0.370$, $p\leq.01$), ascendant tendency ($r=0.407$, $p\leq.01$), dependability ($r=0.245$, $p\leq.01$), sharing in benefits from natural resources ($\chi^2=3.887$,

$p\leq.05$, $\Phi= 0.167$), and non-government assistance ($\chi^2=21.604$, $p\leq.001$ $\Phi=0.393$). The results indicate that there were dependent relations between level of conflict and main occupation, sharing benefits from natural resources, and non-government assistance.

Table 2 Level of cooperation.

(n=140)

No	Activities	Level of Cooperation			
		Low	Moderate (Percent)	High	Very high
1.	Trekking-elephant	13.6	46.4	17.9	22.1
2.	Selling souvenir	7.9	36.4	37.1	18.6
3.	Home-made activities	5.0	43.6	37.9	13.6
4.	Long-tailed boat	23.6	57.9	13.6	5.0
5.	Cattle raising	7.1	68.6	16.4	7.9
6.	Pig raising	5.7	69.3	21.4	3.6
7.	Fishery	9.3	72.1	17.9	0.7
8.	Use of forest (forest management)	4.3	52.1	39.3	4.3
9.	Plantation (rice, vegetable, corn, etc.)	2.1	44.3	49.3	4.3
10.	Promotion	14.3	42.9	41.4	1.4
11.	Organizational role	10.7	62.1	23.6	3.6

Table 3 Correlation coefficients between independent variables and dependent variables using Spearman Rank Correlation Analysis.

Independent variables	Dependent variables	
	Level conflict	Level cooperation
Educational attainment	-0.036 ⁿ	0.008
Length of residence	0.240 ^{**}	-0.150
Length of group membership	0.224 ^{**}	-0.078
Gross annual family income	-0.182 [*]	0.163
Farm size	-0.050	-0.122
Interdependency	0.249 ^{**}	0.255 ^{**}
Interpersonal orientation	-0.123	0.025
Social sensitivity	0.370 ^{**}	0.109
Ascendant tendency	0.407 ^{**}	0.082
Dependability	0.245 ^{**}	-0.203 [*]
Perception toward sustainable tourism	-0.014	0.089
Satisfaction with the existing sustainable tourism	-0.041	0.172 [*]
Environmental awareness	-0.013	-0.123
Cultural sensitivity	-0.165	0.248 ^{**}
Perception toward local policy	-0.137	0.061

* $p<.05$

** $p<.01$

Table 4 Chi-Square Analysis of relationship between independent variables and dependent variables.

Independent variables	Dependent variables	
	Level conflict	Level cooperation
Main occupation	10.477 ^{**} , $\Phi = 0.299$	4.364
Tenure status	0.004	0.990
Sharing in benefits from natural resources	3.887 [*] , $\Phi = 0.167$	8.853 ^{**} , $\Phi = 0.251$
Government assistance	0.588	0.007
Non government assistance	21.604 ^{***} , $\Phi = 0.393$	0.032

* p<.05

** p<.01

*** p<.001

The longer the length of residency and length of group membership, the lesser the gross annual family income, the stronger interdependency, the higher social sensitivity, ascendant tendency, and dependability, would be followed by the higher level of conflict, and vice-versa. Whereas, educational attainment, farm size, tenure status, interpersonal orientation, perception toward sustainable tourism, satisfaction with the existing sustainable tourism, environmental awareness, cultural sensitivity, perception toward local policy, and government assistance, did not have relationship with level of conflict.

Relationship between level of cooperation and independent variables

There were relationships between level of cooperation and independent variables (Table 3 and Table 4), namely, interdependency ($r=0.255$, $p\leq.01$), dependability ($r=-0.203$, $p\leq.05$), satisfaction with the existing sustainable tourism ($r=0.172$, $p\leq.05$), cultural sensitivity ($r=0.248$, $p\leq.01$), and sharing in benefits from natural resources ($\chi^2=21.604$, $p\leq.01$). It could be concluded that the stronger interdependency, the lesser dependability, the higher satisfaction with the existing sustainable tourism and cultural sensitivity, are followed by the higher level of cooperation. The study also proved that there was dependent relationship between sharing in benefit from natural resources and level of cooperation. While, there were no relationships between independent variables, i.e. educational attainment, main occupation, length of

residence, length of group membership, gross annual family income, farm size, interpersonal orientation, social sensitivity, ascendant tendency, perception toward sustainable tourism, environmental awareness, perception toward local policy

Relationship between level of conflict and cooperation

There was negative and significant correlation ($p\leq.05$) between level of conflict and level of cooperation with correlation coefficient of -0.197. It indicates that the higher the level of conflict, the lesser level of cooperation, and inversely, the lesser level of conflict the higher the level of cooperation. It does not mean that the opposite of cooperation is conflict, but as Stoner and Wankel (1987) viewed that the opposite of cooperation is lack of cooperation.

Based on the research findings, Figure 2 shows the revised conceptual model of the study which explains the variables related to the type of participation.

CONCLUSIONS

Dynamics of conflict and cooperation is important in the tourism development to attain sustainable resource management for rural development. Based on the result and discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Conflict in the community is inevitable. Conflict occurs in every activity, it depends on what level or degree of conflict the community has. On

Independent variables

Dependent variables

SOCIAL DEMOGRAPHIC
CHARACTERISTIC

Main occupation

Length of residency

Length of group membership

ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Gross annual family income

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL
CHARACTERISTICS

Interdependency

Social sensitivity

Ascendant tendency

Dependability

ENVIRONMENTALLY RELATED
ATTRIBUTESSatisfaction with the existing
sustainable tourism

Cultural sensitivity

Sharing in benefits from
natural resources

POLITICAL FACTOR

Non-government assistance

LEVEL OF CONFLICT

LEVEL OF COOPERATION

Figure 2 Revised conceptual model showing the independent variables related to level of conflict and level of cooperation.

the other hand, cooperation is attained by members' voluntary dispositions based on the desire to help attain member's goal. Cooperation among members in the village generally moderate, while conflict was within the low level.

2. Nature of conflict is more of an interpersonal type. Interpersonal conflict does not necessarily imply a personality conflict between individuals but it is directly observable through sequences of communicative behavior performed by members of the community. Type of cooperation of local community was mostly of informal type which was common in rural organizations.

3. Consequences of conflict can be either functional or dysfunctional. It can help improve the management of tourism or could demoralize the members, thereby leading to organization paralysis and eventual failure of the community to attain its objective and continue its existence.

4. The leaders and committees are important elements in the community. Their ability to exercise restraint, use of authority, and understanding of the conflict prevent escalation of conflict into greater scale. Not all conflicts can be resolved in a short period of time, particularly when it is interpersonal in nature. Appropriate resolution methods are required and continuing dialogue and interacting among the members are critical in the early resolution of conflicts.

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