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Tourism and Poverty Reduction: The Effect of Tourism on the Livelihood of Local People on Bulon Island, Satun Province, Thailand

การท่องเที่ยวและการลดความยากจนผลกระทบจากการท่องเที่ยวต่อวิถีชีวิตของชาวบ้านเกาะบุโหลน จังหวัดสตูล ประเทศไทย

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate local people's perceptions of poverty and how tourism may be used to improve their livelihoods. It also identifies the barriers that prevent local people from participating in the tourism industry and creates strategies to overcome them. An interpretive paradigm supported by the use of qualitative methods including semi-structured interviews, participant observation and focus groups has been adopted. The data obtained was analyzed by the use of thematic analysis to categorise the emergent key themes. The findings show that poverty, as perceived by local people, is related to the concept of be sufficient rather than the sole effect of deficient income. In addition, it is evident that local people benefit from tourism in terms of employment opportunities, which are important for supplementing work in the seasonal fishing industry. The creation of employment opportunities and an opportunity to earn income especially are beneficial to local women in strengthening their financial status and making them more independent. . The final theme emerging from the data is that factors such as deficiencies in finance and human and social capital bar the local from participation in tourism. Strategies to overcome and increasing local participation are enhance the use of tourism for poverty reduction and alleviation in Bulon. Actions including capacity building and the establishment and strengthening of stakeholder partnerships should be taken.

Keywords: Tourism development, Tourism opportunity, Poverty reduction, Local community

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มุ่งศึกษาถึงความเป็นไปได้ในการใช้การท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นเครื่องมือในการลดความยากจนในเกาะบุโหลน จังหวัดสตูล ในประเด็นเกี่ยวกับการรับรู้ถึงความยากจน ความเป็นไปได้ที่จะใช้การท่องเที่ยวเป็นแนวทางในการพัฒนาชีวิตความเป็นอยู่ อุปสรรคที่ทำให้คนในท้องถิ่นไม่สามารถมีส่วนร่วมในการท่องเที่ยว และการสร้างกลยุทธ์การเข้ามามีส่วนร่วมในการท่องเที่ยว ผู้วิจัยได้ใช้ การสัมภาษณ์ การสังเกต รวมถึงการสนทนากลุ่มเพื่อรวบรวมข้อมูล และประยุกต์ใช้แนวทางการตีความ ประกอบกับการวิเคราะห์แก่นหรือสาระสำคัญ นำเสนอผลแยกตามวัตถุประสงค์ดังนี้ การรับรู้ความยากจน ความเป็นไปได้ที่จะใช้การท่องเที่ยวเป็นแนวทางในการพัฒนาชีวิตความเป็นอยู่ อุปสรรคการมีส่วนร่วมและแนวทางการแก้ไข ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ชาวบ้านรับรู้ถึงความยากจนในความหมายที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการพอมีพอกินมากกว่าการวัดด้วยรายได้ อย่างไรก็ตามเมื่อมีการสร้างความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับการใช้การท่องเที่ยวเพื่อลดปัญหาความยากจน ทำให้ชาวบ้านมองเห็นช่องทางและมีโอกาสในการทำงานที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการท่องเที่ยวระหว่างที่เว้นว่างจากการประกอบอาชีพประมงในช่วงมรสุม อีกทั้งยังสร้างโอกาสในการทำงานให้กับกลุ่มสตรีในหมู่บ้านทำให้กลุ่มสตรีมีโอกาสพึ่งตนเองได้มากขึ้น จากการวิจัยพบว่า การใช้การ

ท่องเที่ยวเพื่อลดปัญหาความยากจนยังมีอุปสรรคอยู่ คือ การมีส่วนร่วมในการท่องเที่ยว ทั้งในแง่ของโอกาสในการเข้าถึงแหล่งเงินทุน และขาดแคลนทุนทางมนุษย์และสังคม กลยุทธ์การเอาชนะอุปสรรคเหล่านี้ คือส่งเสริมให้มีการดำเนินกิจกรรมการเสริมสร้างศักยภาพและการมีส่วนร่วมของทุกภาคส่วนในชุมชน

คำสำคัญ : การพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยว การท่องเที่ยวและโอกาส การลดความยากจน ชุมชนท้องถิ่น

Introduction

Tourism and poverty have become the main concern among many tourism scholars at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000. The UN has put poverty reduction as one of the most urgent tasks in responding to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which ended in 2015, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will continue. In order to achieve the MDGs, the UNWTO presented the concept of Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT), which is defined as tourism that generates net benefit for the poor (Ashley *et al.,* 2001, p.37) and Sustainable Tourism – Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP), which also places focus on poverty reduction. Tourism generates indirect benefits in terms of the development of livelihoods, natural resources, physical infrastructure development and funds for investment in health, education and other assets, all of which can contribute to poverty reduction. The main concept of this research concerns relationships between poverty reduction and tourism development, as well as identifying the factors that prevent local people from participating in tourism and provide recommendations on how to tackle poverty. The Bulon Island is located in Satun Province in southern Thailand, which is about 22 km away from Pakbara Harbour (Figure 1), represents a traditional Muslim Sea-gypsy-fishing community. The population of Bulon, as revealed in 2016, includes 158 families (Satun, 2012, Online). Most of the inhabitants are Muslim Sea gypsies, which is the ethnic minority known as Chao Lay. Chao Lay began to permanently settle on Bulon Island a few decades ago.



Finger 1 shows Bulon Island Map and Satun province
Source: Adapted from https://www.google.co.th/maps [online]: 16 October 2016

Tourism Development on Bulon Island

While the local economy on Bulon Island depends heavily on fishing, especially during the monsoon season, tourism has become the next most important source of income and the primary source of income in its the dry season. Tourism on Bulon Island is very recent, there are few tourist accommodations, located only on Bulon Lay Island. Holden (2013, p. 35) states that tourism has potential to create opportunities for linkages to other economic sectors in which the poor are active in their community through the supply chain that stimulates demand and employment opportunities. On the

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other hand, some literature indicates that when tourism only creates small portion that filters down to the poor local group, it is due to the fact that tourism has the ability to promote additional economic demand in macroeconomic terms. However, tourism has the ability to bring employment opportunities to the local poor community when tourists visit local communities (Boonwanno & Boonprakarn, 2017, p. 75). Harrison (2008, p. 9) posit that PPT needs to ensure that the growth in tourism in community contributes to poverty reduction. Mitchell & Ashley (2010, p. 22) present three pathway benefits of tourism and poverty reduction. Direct effects of tourism shown in Mitchell and Ashley pathway include the income thought employment opportunities for local pool. Income from tourism might improve local well-being, for example by improving the basic infrastructure, such as clean drinking water and sanitation. However, the development of tourism might have adverse effects on the local underprivileged community, for instance reducing their access to beach resources. Secondary effects or indirect effects relate to tourism spending impacts on the non-tourism economy, including income from tourism spending in local community. The third pathway involves long term changes in the macro economy in local community.

Research Objectives

This research aims to investigate local people's perceptions of poverty in Bulon Island, Satun Province. Secondly, how tourism may be used to improve their livelihoods. Third, identifies the barriers that prevent local people from participating in tourism and lastly giving recommendation to overcome them.

Research Methodology

This research combined interpretive paradigm and qualitative methodology. The data collection took place in two different periods: tourism and non-tourism seasons. There were thirty-six participants purposively recruited from sea-gypsy community members in an island community of southern Thailand. Two focused-group interviews were conducted. The research also adapted 'participatory observation' which took place around the island and island's public area. The researcher's participation in community activities and informal conversations with Bulon community were observed and recorded in the researcher's field notes and drawings. Data were analysed by means of adapted thematic analysis, which allowed the researcher to immerse herself into the data.

Result

Local Perceptions of Poverty: Local Sea gypsies' perceptions of poverty

By asking 'what does poverty mean to you?', being self-sufficient is the main theme emerging from the data. Being self-sufficient was the theme most frequently mentioned by interviewees, which shows that the locals conceptualise poverty as being able to support their families. Interviewees explained their meaning of poverty in relation to the fishing activity and the amount of fish or seafood caught per month, not how much money they earn.

> *I think poverty means we cannot [go] fishing and can only [catch a] few fish, sorry I don't know other meanings (Manut).*
>
> *I am not sure but to me poverty is not about income, it is depend[ent] on my fishing; I catch fish, then bring [them] back home. My wife cook[s them and] we have food to eat, if I can catch more fish, then I can sell it (Bak).*

'Subsistence' is the word most appropriate to local people's perception of poverty on Bulon Island. According to the above interviews and from the researcher's observation, Bulon Island local people's

lives are mostly dependent on fishing activities as they are the main or only income generator for local people's families. In other words, fishing activities have impacts on local people's livelihoods the most and huge effects on the consumption of most families on Bulon Island. Moreover, they have no need to buy other types of meat, such as beef, because the husband will bring home fish or other types of seafood which is left from the sale or cannot be sold. Some families also grow their own vegetables. It is understandable that local people's perception of poverty on Bulon Island is mainly related to their fishing activities; therefore, a decrease in the amount of caught fish or seafood will have huge effects on them. The majority of local people on Bulon Island view poverty as something close to their lives; that is, they see it as the amount of fish and seafood they can catch and whether it is sufficient for their family to consume. They do not see themselves as being trapped in poverty if they can catch enough fish and seafood for consumption, which will allow them to be self-sufficient. Another group described themselves as the poor even if they catch enough fish but have no secure income. The latter group, therefore, are not self-sufficient even though they catch enough fish to consume in their families.

How tourism improve local people livelihoods: The Interaction between Tourism and Poverty Reduction

Economic Benefits

Employment and income opportunities are economic benefits local people on Bulon Island have received from the development of tourism. Local people have been employed in a variety of tourism businesses. When comparing employment in tourism to other economic sectors, local people on Bulon Island have found that tourism provides more attractive options than other sectors of the economy, such as working in the fishing industry in mainland Satun province or for large fishing companies, working in speedboat or transportation companies, or getting fishery-related jobs in other provinces, such as Bangkok. Furthermore, the development of tourism helps to stop the migration of local people on the Island to other locations in search of employment. Although tourism activity is seasonal, local people on Bulon Island consider employment in the tourism sector to be relatively stable in comparison to fishing; they also found it to be more attractive. Tourism provides a stable income compared to fishing and fishermen are able to earn extra income from tourism after they have finished fishing. Employment opportunities and the participation of local people in tourism on Bulon Island arise from direct and indirect participation within the industry. Local people on Bulon Island are generally employed in bungalows and restaurants used by tourists. Tourism activity also provides local people with self-employment opportunities, including family-owned businesses, such as bungalows, restaurants or long-tailed boats business. This study shows that local people are normally employed in unskilled jobs that are low-paid and temporary, compared with people from the mainland working on Bulon Island, who have secure and well-paid jobs in the tourism sector; these workers tend to possess language skills, connections and have some formal education. Tourism also offers opportunities to provide coping mechanisms for local people vulnerable to external shocks. The study of Bulon Island shows that income generated by tourism enables local people to have savings for emergencies, such as illnesses, natural disasters, bad weather or the sudden loss of the breadwinners, as this kind of vulnerability to external shocks could tip them into poverty. It is clearly shown that income generated by tourism on Bulon Island helps the locals to save; whilst some families save for their children's education, others save money for future investment in fishing. The research results demonstrate that local people can benefit from tourism in terms of employment, business and infrastructure development; however, these advantages will not

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necessarily eliminate poverty in the long term. This study finds that there might be a gap in the role tourism has to play in poverty reduction at local and national levels. However, in order to overcome this, the research suggests that it is important to capture the ways in which local people participate in tourism. Based on the literature, the revenue growth from tourism may have dynamic effects on the rest of the economy.

Non-Cash Livelihood Benefits: Empowerment and Social Dimension of Gender

This study stresses that an emphasis on understanding poverty from income should be shifted to focus on non-income indicators, such as empowerment, the social dimension of gender and immigration of local people, all of which are alternative perspectives for tourism development being used to reduce poverty. Prior to the development of tourism on Bulon Island, perception of local people's empowerment indicated that local people lacked participation in the community and decision-making. However, this study on Bulon Island confirmed that tourism helps develop and that tourism has potential to empower local people, especially women in such a developing country as Thailand. It is important and needs to be analyze to understand the reality of tourism and poverty reduction. There are significant changes in the publications of UNWTO, focusing on the pro-poor impact of tourism. As the study partly focused on poverty reduction, UNWTO targeted the increase in the role of women in tourism to achieve the MDGs, especially Goal 3. In 2010, the report presented by UNWTO showed the significant contribution of both direct and indirect tourism to employment as it contributed to 6–7% of jobs worldwide. In Thailand and other developing countries, women have less access to education and employment, and this is also true in Bulon, where fishing is seen as men's work and local (Poor) women mainly often have household responsibilities. The analysis in this study supports that tourism improves the local community's gender social dimension. Local women are employed and undertake jobs in the tourism sector available on the island. Some had opportunities to run their own business. They are able to earn income for their household within the scope of their traditional culture and norms.

Barriers to Local Participation in Tourism

Firstly, lack of Financial Capital; financial capital is defined as income and credit available for local people to invest in new ventures. Local people on Bulon Island lack financial capital and access to financial services, including credit, which is a major limitation for local investment in tourism. Local people's lack of employment opportunities and steady incomes results in an inability to accumulate capital. Secondly lack of Human Capital, in terms of knowledge and skills, limits the ability of local people to be employed in tourism. Subsequently, the well-paid jobs are taken by people from outside Bulon Island, while the locals work in the casual sector and are poorly paid or excluded. This may explain poor attendance at school and the conditions for the poverty cycle have thus been created. Poverty makes it necessary for children to work; they thus deny an education and have little chance to foresee their employment opportunities in the future. The government provides free compulsory education and scholarships for further education, aiming to encourage local children and parents to value education. Lastly lack of Social Capital; inhabitants on Bulon Island understand that they lack social capital in terms of no decision-making power and their exclusion from employment and investment opportunities. Additionally, people see themselves being excluded from social capital as they are marginalized. Although appearing to be included, in reality, they are excluded in a number of ways. For example, they participate in tourism through employment but they hold unskilled and low-paid jobs; they are also invited to meetings with

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local government officers to take part in policy-making but they are not able to share their opinions or make decisions. To overcome this, there is a need to develop a participatory strategy to give a voice to local people and to bring local stakeholders together in the decision-making process.

Recommendations for Tourism strategies development on Bulon Island

Enhancing Employment of Local People

For tourism on Bulon Island to truly benefit local people, there is a need to improve employment opportunities. The local government or local community, together with the private sector, should encourage all stakeholders on Bulon Island, including the owners of bungalows, restaurants and speedboat companies, to employ more local people. An economic benefit strategy should be used on Bulon Island to promote employment opportunities to everyone in the local community, both men and women. Equality of employment between men and women and everyone in the community should be created. In addition, local women should be encouraged to run small-scale businesses.

Increasing Access to Training and Skills Provision for Local People

The need to improve the human capital of local people through training and skills provision is evident in this study. Opportunities should be provided for local people to get free access to training courses and the training period should be convenient and suitable. For example, training courses might be run during monsoon season when local people cannot work in tourism industry or go fishing. The training course should include tourism-related activities, such as becoming a tour guide, basic conversational English class or home-stay management, as well as courses not related to tourism activity. To achieve this, local organizations (Satun local government, TAT in Satun) and non-governmental organizations or universities, such as Prince of Songkla University, should cooperate with local government offices on Bulon Island in running training programs. Such programs should be established on a long-term basis to enable evaluation of the effectiveness of the programs and to make on-going revisions for improvement.

Tourism Linkages with the Local Economy

The establishment of economic linkages between tourism and other sectors of the economy, especially agriculture, fishing and handicrafts, can lead to significant gains for local people. Bulon community already links fishing to tourism by selling seafood directly to bungalows and restaurants and by adapting long-tailed boats to transfer tourists to other islands or by arranging tour trips to nearby islands. However, the local community could benefit economically more than it currently does and such benefits can be expanded to everybody in the community, such as through products developed from the fishing industry using raw fish or seafood products. Such initiatives should be supported. Raw materials that can be locally sourced should also be developed into new products in order to create new jobs that can add value to the community; for example, adding more value to raw seafood products and selling them directly to tourists, making fish crisps or prawn crackers as local Bulon products. Further involvement of fishing business in tourism would benefit local fishermen, as there are many good examples around the world of close relationships between individual hotels and restaurants and local farmers from neighboring poor communities.

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Building Partnerships among Stakeholders

Stakeholders are defined as an individual, community group or organisation sharing an interest in the outcome of an activity, whether through being affected by it or by being able to influence it (UNWTO, 2011, Online). For a poverty reduction strategy to be successful on Bulon Island, a full range of stakeholders must be involved, including the Tourism Authority of Thailand (Satun branch), the local Satun government and the private sector (owners of bungalows, restaurants, homestays, speedboat companies etc.) and the local community. All these groups should ideally work together for tourism planning to improve the quality, reliability and competitiveness of local products. A stakeholders' partnership should also address sustainable development and ensure it covers three main pillars, which are social justice, economic development and environmental concerns.

Encouraging Local Tourism Enterprises

Encouraging local tourism enterprises brings sustainable solutions to the problems of poverty. Environmental sustainability pillars, which are effectively implemented, provide sustainable environmental practices that will ensure that natural assets on Bulon Island will be preserved and continually support the livelihood of people in the community. For social culture sustainability, tourism activity can have a multiplier effect on social assets; for example, due to their Islamic culture, local people are not allowed to consume or drink alcohol; therefore, the development of tourism and demand from tourists for alcohol need to be appropriate and respectful to the local culture. For economic sustainability, encouraging local people to start on a small-scale would allow local people to be involved directly in the tourism industry, whereas they usually benefit via intermediaries. Practical methods must also be implemented, such as promoting local livelihoods and helping them to learn about good management in managing their income. The seasons for tourism and fishing are the same and, thus, local people can earn more income at that time, whereas they cannot do so in the monsoon season. Therefore, without careful management, local people might be living in poverty during the monsoon season. However, poverty reduction on Bulon Island should also involve turning income from fishing and tourism into long-term development. For instance, investing in their children's education will allow their children to break out of the poverty cycle.

Discussion

The results of this research show that local people perception of poverty are mainly related to their fishing activities; therefore, a decrease in the amount of caught fish or seafood will have huge effects on them. The majority of local people on Bulon Island view poverty as something close to their lives. However, this research shows tourism created employment opportunities for local residents, especially for women having more opportunities for jobs and running their own business. Employment for women is essential to ensure they do not remain marginalized but are brought more into the mainstream of society. The development of basic infrastructures in Bulon community in public transportation system and waste management will indirectly benefit local fishermen to expand their fishery. This research also demonstrates the perceptions local people have developed towards tourism largely relate to the income they make from tourism. Moreover, the results show that the benefits from tourism also increased local people's participation in local community activities.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This research suggests that the development of tourism itself may not necessarily eliminate poverty in the long- or immediate-term by having a huge effect on the poverty situation the local community has been facing. However, to achieve the goal of using tourism to reduce poverty, it is important to carry out different plans and enforce long-term development in other aspects, such as development in education, opportunities for higher education of local children, and infrastructure. The income from tourism and the development of tourism itself have potential to make those happen and to help local people break out from the poverty cycle. This research also suggests it is essential to form partnerships between the different stakeholders in tourism and ensure benefits are distributed equally to everyone in the community so that policies and practices created will lead the industry towards poverty reduction.

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