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The Role of Local Leadership in Community- Based Rural Homestay in Malaysia

Siti Aisah Abas*

Department of Tourism, Kulliyah of Languages and Management, International Islamic University Malaysia
Malaysia

Norhazliza Abd Halim

Faculty of Built Environment and Surveying, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
Malaysia

*Corrospoding author's Email: sitiaisah@iiu.edu.my

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lat 306 Savoy Residencia, Block 3 F11/1, 44000 Islamabad. Pakistan,
info@readersinsight.net

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Research Highlights

This conceptual research intended to highlight the emergent concept of local leadership in Community-Based Rural Homestay (CBRH) in Malaysia. In addition, the development and progress of local participation in CBRH also become the focal point to be discussed. Undeniably, Community-Based Rural Homestay become a vehicle and development for local community to enhance their socioeconomy through engagement as homestay operators. Ministry of Tourism and Culture put a lot effort to improve infrastructure and facilities in every homestay providers to boost up tourist arrival. Apart of being source of income to local community, CBRH also offers various local product, quality rural experience and culture preservation and conservation for tourist. Thus, CBRH programme has proved as a platform for local community empowerment and distributed benefit as individual or collective basis. Most of the homestay operator motivated to participate in this programme due to value-added to their source of income and medium for them to promote their local culture to tourist. However, incompetent leaders to lead the CBRH initiatives become a challenge to homestay operator as they need a proactive leaders to drive and facilitate them in order to handle tourist and homestay operation.

Research Objectives

The first problem to be highlighted in this research is lack of leadership as one of the limitation that leads to barriers for local community to involve in tourism activities. Most of the other areas has been discussed, however leadership context in the rural and community development still not been explored yet. This is unexpected as leadership subject should be given a priority as this area has proven that significant to the development of rural tourism industry. Kayat (2009), discovered most of the factors that leads to failure of homestay programme are because of the lacking interest among local community to involve, the incompetent skills and knowledge of local leaders in managing the resources. Thus, capable and committed local leaders is required to ensure local community participation and support to the tourism activities. Partaking a decent local leader and success to persuades community involvement is an enabling local community to improve and developed standard of living, enhance knowledge on tourism and participate in decision making in which very crucial to ensure the successful of CBRH.





This conceptual paper attempt to identify development concept and role of local leadership in Community-Based Rural Homestay (CBRH) and to determine the role of leadership

Methodology

This conceptual paper is solely based on secondary data in which gathered from journal, articles, research project and manual. Fin et all (2000) explained that secondary data will facilitate researchers to familiarize theoretical and substantive issue of the study. Content analysis is performed from the previous research finding and interpreted to enhance the understanding on local leadership in rural tourism development. In addition, this research also reviewing the documents on the Malaysia Plan, Rural Tourism Master Plan (2001) and research project by Asia Economic Cooperation (APEC) Tourism Chapter.

Results

Initially, Luke (1997) described leadership as parallel with previous research that facilitator or leader is the one who are take the initiative to step forward and make sure local community will participate to meet goals, build trust and support collaborative efforts. Similarly, Grisham (2010) classified leader as ‘catalyst’ that represent the community to ensure that the project could be done and meet the objectives on time. In addition, these individuals very capable to persuades other to participate and get involved. Leader focused on getting and achieving the goals and objective of project.

In another study that relevant to leadership in community development, McKnight (2003), outlined four most crucial indicators of good leader. The first indicators explained on the participation among citizen and stressed on community ability to engage to achieve a vision. Next indicator is described as the leaders must have the ability to fabricate the direction of citizen. However, the citizen is required not to depends on the leaders too much and they must have an initiative to move forward. The third indicator, leaders will provide a platform to the citizen in terms opportunity to develop themselves. Last indicators explained that, citizen should use the power that they have to help others as the voluntary association not profit oriented organization.





While formal leader, such as the village headman, are competent in overseeing a community's cohesion and welfare based on traditional knowledge system, they might not have a capacity to lead a tourism business. capacity building is therefore a major challenge to help to ensure the initial success of CBT effort. Longer term success, however requires a transition from a local leader to a more diversified management model (Moeurn et al, 2008).

In the Malaysian context, the term of local champion has been introduced by Hamzah and Khalifah (2009) that represent the local community to be empowered in tourism development through their participation and support. In a nutshell, local champion very significant in rural development in Malaysia, consists of a person or a small group, helps to push forward within the community that engage in tourism activities. Furthermore, local champion is considered as one of the crucial elements in Community-Based Tourism setting. Initially, it is difficult to persuades the local community to participate in tourism activities, lacking in terms of assets or limited market access to start with, however the commitment of local champion become the essential driving force for the development of community-based tourism. Fostering change and leading the community even more tough especially involve on the community-large scale. Therefore, the roles of local champion in community development is very significant to the success of community development in rural destination. However, Bowers and Hamby (2013) discovered contradict where volunteer leader and champion are not exactly related. Local champion is the one who have the emergent qualities to lead local community, but the volunteer leader is regards as well-trained to organize programme and events. Furthermore, volunteer leader always relatable to reward and recognition upon the good performance, enhance community motivation to engage and encourage them sincerely.

In 2011, Onyx and Leonard discovered leaders as people with ability to organize community even though there are lacking on human resources, training and social capital to nurturing local community in tourism development. Through an observation on case study found that most of the leaders were embedded and participated by formal and informal network but not holding any position in the government. Next, emergent leaders implementing a top-down decision whereby most of the decision are based on collective opinion. Most of the leaders determined by open system that aims to bridging link with other stakeholders and people are required to have resources, knowledge and skill. In order to achieve a vision and direction in the community development, the emergent leaders should be able to encourage and motivate local community along the decision process.

In Thailand, the local leaders are called as Poo Yai Baan or village headman who are responsible to initiate, develop and manage community-based tourism activities. As the village headman with the little power, authority and respect, it is difficult to work with external factors in the sense of benefiting the local community (Kontogeorgopoulos et al, 2014). The head village must have a good working relationship with external parties which includes entertaining the academicians who are researching the community-based tourism, working closely with the NGOs to officials at all level of governments. The efforts that has





been laid by the head village as the local leaders become a critical indicator to the success of rural tourism destination in Thailand.

Findings

Hamzah and Khalifah (2009) discovered term of “Local Champion” that represent the leaders who are involved in Community-Based Tourism (CBT). The local champion concept is one that has not been clearly defined in the literature especially in community engagement and participation. The leader can be a government appointed project manager, a dedicated volunteer hired by an NGO or a self-appointed spokesperson for the community. To be exact, the leader should be termed as the local champion, and many of the local community activities are driven by local champion (Hamzah & Khalifah, 2009). Similarly, research finding done by Worthy et al (2016) discovered local champion may have been one-person, multiple people, groups or association in a community. On the other hand, study on official role and leadership attributes of local champion is remain understudied. To date, the “local champion” concept is one that has not been well defined in the literature on community engagement or community development.

Local Champion is proved as one of the driven factors that influence the performance Community Based Tourism and community development in rural tourism destination (Mohamad, Hamzah & Khalifah, 2013). Initially, in the beginning process of set up the local community participation in tourism project, most of the common issues and problem facing are lacking tourism resources and limited capital to start with however, the ability of local champion to provide platform to facilitate can be powerful force for CBT. Furthermore, Hamzah and Khalifah has outlined ten prominent indicators that represent the local champion leadership qualities which are trustworthiness, perseverance, selflessness, patience, good communicator, disciplined, resourceful, visionary, proactive, courageous and sensible. All the qualities of local champion have presented the principles and abilities that leads to the successful performance of CBT.

The concept of local champion has been started in line with the development of Homestay Programme in Malaysia as Shariman Hamdan who a pensioner school teacher was, passionately initiate the Desa Murni Homestay in Pahang. Through his networking with international relations, he managed to attract Japanese tourist to came to Pahang and experience the Malaysia Homestay Programme. Having vast experienced managing and operating homestay programme, Shariman considered as a pioneer local champion in





Malaysia who are drive forward the culture and quality experience of the local community to other level.

The growth of the Community-Based Rural Homestay (CBRH) is seen as new dimension and direction to the local community in rural area. The roles of local champion are very crucial to facilitate local community to participation in tourism development. Local champion is considered as one of the internal success factor of CBRH in Malaysia. However, the leadership problem has affect the performance of homestay programme and tourist arrival as well (Kayat & Mohd nor, 2010). Therefore, the role of local champion in very pertinent to shape the local community development to the right direction.

Having discussed on the definition and leadership qualities of local champion, however, there is limitation on providing further information on the characteristics of local champion. Thus, future research should consider looking into to the overall characteristics, leadership qualities, knowledge, training that local champion should focus on.

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