Community Participation as a Tool for Tourism and Environmental Conservation: A Case of Bang Ta Boon Village, Phetchaburi, Thailand

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Abstract

Within a wide body of literature, it has been debated that community participation in tourism development is advantageous in terms of the sustainability and effectiveness of the conservation policies adopted. As tourism is frequently cited as a tool by which Thais can strengthen the economies of their cultural and natural resources, thriving tourism development stands in need of citizen participation in the planning and development process. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the characteristic of community participation expected by various interest groups with special references to a fishing village destination in Thailand. Field research was designed and applied through a case study approach. The fishing village of Bang Ta Boon, located in a bay off the Gulf of Thailand in Phetchaburi province has proved to be a practicable community to undertake community participation in tourism and environmental conservation. Findings show that the expected nature of community participation by interest groups varies from non-participation to one form of spontaneous participation, even though politically Thailand has been considered unstable towards community participation. Possible success factors are discussed and suggestions for conducting similar future research on Thailand’s destinations are advanced for consideration.

Keywords: community participation, tourism development, environmental conservation

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1. Introduction and Background

Tourism around the globe, and particularly in developing countries, suffers from skewed development that often produces a disproportionate distribution of return. Communities, particularly rural ones, are often at the front line in service provision but last to receive benefits from the effort. Tourism in the developing world has frequently been a double-edged sword. Whilst it may provide an income for communities and local residents to augment their local area or personal livelihoods, the majority of benefits are more likely to flow out. In addition, tourism development imposes various economic, socio-cultural and environmental changes on the host community’s life, some more beneficial than others (Lee, 2013). However, rapid and uncontrolled tourism development, especially in small communities, has been associated with a series of direct and indirect environmental, social and economic costs. Some of these include increases in pollution, congestion, noise, crime, visual deterioration of the natural and man-made environment, economic instability caused by over-concentration in a single sector at the cost of traditional activities and over-dependence on external seasonal fluctuations of demand (Latkova and Vogt, 2012; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2010; Bosselman, 1978; Bryden, 1973 and Loukissas, 1978, 1982, 1983). Hence, the participation and support of local residents is essential for the sustainability of the tourism industry at any destination (Gursoy, Chi and Dyer, 2010). Tourism theory has recognized the fundamental importance of the quality of the environment for ensuring the future existence of most types of tourist destinations (Mihalic, 2000). Understanding the residents’ perspective can facilitate policies which minimize the potential negative impacts of tourism development and maximize its benefits, leading to community development and greater support for tourism (Prayag, Hosany, Nunkoo, and Alders, 2013). As a result, this research seeks to establish research aims and objectives and a research question with respect to these derived aspects.

2. Reviews of Literature

Popular Participation in the Western World
The ambitious nature of current concepts of community participation is revealed also in the prerequisites for participation which have been identified by various writers. Most participation literature suggests that community participation may possess a potential to help develop better village-based tourism planning and conservation which are more responsive to local needs and have a better chance of community acceptance. Community participation is based on the legacy of western ideology that is ordinary citizens have a right to share in decision-making which is the inspiration of democratic ideals. It also attempts to mobilize citizens to improve their social and economic conditions (Brokensha and Hodge, 1969). Arnstein’s (1969) definition of real citizen participation is that “It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future” (p. 216). As believed by Pretty (1995), one views participation as a means to increase efficiency, the central notion being that if people are involved, then they are more likely to agree with and support the new development or service and the other sees participation as a fundamental right, in which the main aim is to initiate mobilization for collective action, empowerment and institution building. In recent years, there have been an increasing number of comparative studies of development projects showing that participation is “one of the critical components of success” (Pretty, 1995, p. 1251) because it has been related to increased mobilization of stakeholder ownership of policies and projects, greater efficiency, understanding and social cohesion, more cost-effective services, greater transparency and accountability, increased empowering of the ordinary citizens and strengthened capacity of people to learn and act (Montgomery, 1983; Paul, 1987; USAID, 1987; Baker, Knipscheer and Neto, 1988; Reij, 1988; Finsterbusch and van Wiclen, 1989; Bagadion and Korten, 1991; Cernea, 1991; Guijt, 1991; Kottak, 1991; Pretty and Sandbrook, 1991; Uphoff, 1992; Narayan, 1993; World Bank, 1994). Consequently, Pretty (1995, p. 1251) notes that the terms “people’s participation” and “popular participation” are now part of the normal language of many development agencies, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government departments and banks (Adnan, Barrett, Nural and Brustinow, 1992; Bhatnagar and William, 1992; World Bank 1994). Tosun (2000) states that regarding a
community participation refers to a form of voluntary action in which individuals confront opportunities and responsibilities of citizenship. Consequently, community participation is a tool to readjust the balance of power and reassure local community views against those of the developers or the local authority, or to re-evaluate professionalism, which may determine the factors of attainable participation and preclude manipulation of a community in the participation process.

3. Research Objectives

In order to have a comprehensive view of the issues regarding public participation in tourism and environment conservation in a remote community destination in the Bang Ta Boon Village, five objectives in this exploratory research were formulated in the sources of data gained while this research is being conducted. The first objective relates to the exploration of the residents’ knowledge of tourism and their perception of tourism and environmental conservation. Objective two to three are aimed at identifying current local tourism activities and operation and at what level local residents are involved in their tourism and environmental conservation structures. Objective four entails the study of the value of Western approaches to public participation in a Thai context and how local participation in tourism and environmental conservation in a Western context can be practiced or designed to fit with local participation in tourism and environmental conservation in Thai tourism participation; and the final one is designed to investigate local constraints of local residents in participatory tourism and environmental conservation process.

4. Research Methodology and Methods

The Case Study Method in Social Inquiry and Its Advantages

As tourism is a social, economic, and environmental activity, social researchers are familiar with the concepts of qualitative vs. quantitative research; both methods are generally regarded as useful and legitimate (Walle, 1997). A broad array of approaches and methods are categorized specifically under the interpretive paradigm, stemming from interpretive ethnography, phenomenology, semiotic and hermeneutic traditions within cultural anthropology, sociology, folklore and literary criticism.
(Schultz and Hatch, 1996). The case study strategy employed in the study involved the use of varied research methods and types of data. As Pearce (2001) explains, the application of multiple data sources promotes the range of material available for analysis and it facilitates the cross-checking of interpretations. The data collection instruments employed in this study combined both primary data (interview transcripts and observation data) and secondary data, which allowed for data triangulation. The observational method enables the researcher to apprehend and record events as they occur, no matter how unpredictable they are. According to Cohen et al. (2000, p. 315), ‘observation methods are powerful tools for gaining insights into situations.’ However, the questions of validity and reliability, even more than with other techniques, are crucial to the trustworthiness of the data collected and of the whole study. Marshall and Rossman (2006) argue that such clues indicate it is crucial to integrate observation with in-depth interviews. The researcher set the aims for the observation before going into the field, which related to observing the nature of tourism and environmental conservation process, tourism operation and activities in the Bang Ta Boon Village, the results of the community involvement in tourism, and residents’ non-verbal language during the interviews. Field notes were made during the fieldwork, including immediately after the interviews. The researcher also took photographs of the tourism operation and activities in order to comprehend the current atmosphere and the recent developments. These field notes and photographs were combined together with the interview transcripts and other data sources for the analysis.

The interviews in the fieldwork were conduct during 2012-2014. A series of questions was designed for the interviews. These questions sought to understand the residents’ knowledge of their village’s tourism and environment, their involvement in tourism and environmental management and conservation, what has been done or is being done in local community, environmental conservation, the level of participation in tourism and environmental conservation, in Western techniques the residents and the community use in tourism and environmental conservation process, including the local constraints in participation in tourism and environmental conservation in the Bang Ta Boon Village. The interviewees were asked a variety of
questions regarding their knowledge, awareness, and motivations in local tourism and environmental conservation. A combination of closed – and open-ended questions were included to elicit qualitative data. Therefore, these questions were designed to provide residents, community leader, and public sector members the opportunity to voice their own views.

**Sampling Method and Selection of Participant Size**

It is incumbent on the researcher to clearly define the target population. There is no strict rule to follow, and the researcher must rely on logic and judgment. The population is defined in keeping with the objectives of the study and the sample reflects the characteristics of the population from which it is drawn. The interviewees for this research were selected through both purposive and snowball sampling. This combination was chosen because it ensured that individuals selected for interviewing would be those who were involved in, or else were knowledgeable about, the tourism and environmental conservation activities in the village. It also ensured that they were representatives of actor groups pertinent to the study. There were 30 interviews in this study. This was considered a medium size according to Patton’s (1990) qualitative evaluation and research methods.

The concept of popular participation potentially engulfs a vast area of philosophy, policy considerations, programmes and practical experience. Hence, no single document can do justice to the intricacy of considerations of such interwoveed popular participation. The researcher hopes, however, that the present study can highlight some of the potential means enabling local residents and other groups to improve public participation in community-based tourism and environmental conservation. Therefore, on a subject as comprehensive as popular participation, the available empirical information should be very instrumental to this research. There are, for example, many studies on popular participation aspects of local development based on experience in community and co-operative development.

6. Research Findings

**The Community’s Context**
The Bang Ta Boon Village was chosen as a case study as they had the potential, motivation and capacity of operating village tourism development projects and environmental conservation plans which are primarily based on community participation. There are 11 villages with the number of population of 5,395 under the administration of Bang Ta Boon Sub-District, Ban Laem, Phetchaburi. The community lies on the banks of the Phetchaburi River which flows into the Gulf of Thailand. The houses are built along the river so that the villagers can travel and go fishing and undertake prawn farming conveniently. In consequence, the overall image of Bang Ta Boon Village’s economic condition can be perceived as a self-sufficient, complete modern economy which is blended together and has become a distinctive point of the Sub-District to run business with other villages and districts in Phetchaburi province. The village’s environmental conservation is celebrated as one of the best-managed mangrove forest conservation areas in Thailand. The village draws mostly domestic tourists to experience whale watching in the Gulf of Thailand every year.

Democratic Form through Community Tourism

The key people in the village’s tourism and environmental conservation activities are the Village Headman and the Mayor of the Bang Ta Boon Municipality. There are also some households directly affiliated with tourism activities. However, the rest have no specific participation in the tourism activity, instead they are asked by the Village Headman to be the village’s tourism supporters. Some of them function as local guides and assistants for tourists during the whale-watching season. The villagers spend national holidays cleaning village land and the waterfront areas. The village members prepare information boards for tourists to read, improve the village landscape and decorate the village with ornamental plants. The riverbank and coastal zone are well-preserved and cleaned so that tourists can sit comfortably to see the view of the Phetchaburi River estuary and the Gulf of Thailand. Meanwhile, the villagers provide assistance and arrange patrolmen to increase safety and security for tourists. Villagers with involvement in whale-watching emphasize the rules and laws concerning wildlife protection. Further, they work closely with the village in regard to Public Health precautions concerning mosquitoes and other insects. So, before the
tourists arrive, and during the tourist season, the residents’ participation level is quite visible. The villagers will get together, clean the village area, attend meetings periodically and evaluate the tourism and environmental situation. In general, the villagers’ responsibilities in tourism operations and environmental conservation activities are integrated and shared among the village members. The villagers of Bang Ta Boon Village also team up with the Bang Ta Boon Sub-District and the staff of the Municipality to improve the village’s surroundings and undertake landscape improvement schemes.

**Measuring Public Response and Level of Community Participation**

The residents of Bang Ta Boon Village are made aware that the Village Headman and his conservation team value them and make an effort to get the villagers involved in the village's tourism and environmental conservation to a certain degree. The residents acknowledge that it is their role and responsibility to take part in the tourism activities and environmental protection and conservation. The Village Headman has put village tourism into categories; nature and wildlife tourism (mangrove forest and whale-watching tourism). He and his conservation team assign groups of villagers to be in charge of different village functions. If any village member does not get involved in the tourism activities, he will be asked by the Village Headman to take part in other activities instead. For instance, if any resident is not keen to take part in welcoming the guests, he will be assigned to work on general functions like maintaining the village temple, school, village hall or the village electrical systems. The community needs to explain to tourists the villagers’ tasks so that they understand the villagers’ working systems. Apart from tourism activities in the village, the Village Headman focuses on the other general community affairs. The villagers are asked to help take good care of the community’s environment and general orderliness. The community leaders; the Head of a group of 11 villages and 11 Village Headmen in the Bang Ta Boon Sub-District and the Municipality continually encourage the village members to take part in their tourism and environmental conservation activities. Most of the annual revenue of the residents is from fishery activities and additional income is derived from village tourism, mangrove forest and
whale-watching tourism. The villagers can make thousands of baht from selling sea food and sea products (e.g. dried fish and mussels) to the massive number of visitors coming to spend their leisure time in the community. The Mayor of the Bang Ta Boon Municipality is the main person who encourages the village members to participate in tourism planning and environmental conservation activities. The Mayor reasoned that the villagers deserved the extra income generated from tourism and environmental conservation in the village. Village tourism in Bang Ta Boon Village creates more participation by villagers in tourism planning and environmental conservation according to their responsibilities assigned by their local government agency. This enables them to see not only the importance of their tourism industry, the importance of environment of the village’s shoreline but also the added income which is generated. The village’s tourism stimulates its local economy, improves the cohesion of the community and the villagers’ collaboration among themselves and with other sectors.

Community Meetings and Public Hearings/Forums as Techniques to Promote Community Involvement in Tourism and Environmental Conservation

To be able to hear the villagers’ opinions, the Mayor and his conservation team allow them to provide their ideas to add to the community plans so as to stimulate them to take part in community planning and the environmental conservation process. In relation to tourism planning and the environmental conservation process, the Mayor will ask for votes among the villagers as to whether past experiences in tourism planning and environmental conservation have been satisfactorily achieved, and what the villagers’ desires are to do in the future. Therefore, the villagers are allowed to express their opinions with regard to any concerns at community meetings. The contents of the meeting with the members at the village hall are related to government matters which include drug issues, immigrant workers, pollution which affects cockle farming and fisheries, agricultural information, government policies, or the problems the village are facing or urgent government information that is on the top of the list for discussion at the meeting.
One primary school teacher explained the regular village meeting schedule is that the villagers have a monthly meeting with the Village Headman and sometimes they have two meetings a month depending on urgent or crucial matters and the village members sign in to attend the meeting. Hence, everything is mainly based on the members’ viewpoints and the popular votes at the meetings. Aside from the meetings, the villagers also receive information and news from government sectors through documents such as leaflets and mail merges. The government letters and documents are posted at the village hall.

Limitations in Community Participation

The factors affecting community participation in tourism planning and environmental conservation in Bang Ta Boon Village, Phetchaburi are related to the change of the village’s demographic structure, the residents’ fishing careers, the villagers’ perceptions and motivations in their tourism and environmental conservation, operations and activities. It is clear that a working generation does not exist in the village and it has become the village’s drawback for ideal community participation. The majority of the village members are elderly who are at home taking care of their children’s children. Regarding this issue, when the villagers need brainstorming about their tourism planning, environmental conservation process or village activities, the senior citizens have become more passive in it than actively sharing opinions. The young who are supposed to help develop the community in any aspect have left the community for schooling or employment in the manufacturing industry in Bangkok or other larger cities and some are busy with their fishing at sea. So, the younger ones and the elderly are not able to take part in tourism planning and environmental conservation often enough. The gathering of the villagers is confined to a small group which has not much potential to drive community participation and it causes slow development and conservation in the village. However, the young village members who are working outside the community will return to the village and take part in the village's tourism during the Thai New Year and Buddhist Lent when the factories are closed and during the fish spawning season. The community participation in tourism planning and environmental conservation in
the village should have been carried out continuously and not only during those festivals or during specific events. Likewise, other villagers who are not working outside the community have to go fishing at sea for almost nine months of the year so they cannot engage in public activities to the full extent.

7. Discussion of the Results

As demonstrated in the studied case, qualification of the level of participation in local tourism and environmental conservation provided an understanding of participant’s reactions. Appropriate participation levels will change with differing situations and differing audiences. Aiming for a high participation level may not necessarily be appropriate and some situations may require little community participation. Understanding levels of community participation, participant’s needs and expectations, community development program objectives and techniques for encouraging participation is necessary for each individual situation. Encouraging participation at the appropriate level is key to local tourism in this village.

At its most fundamental, community involvement takes the shape of informing local residents of activities or plans that might affect them (Pretty, 1995). The main actors in this process are the Village Headman, the Sub-District as local government and the Municipality. The residents have inputs, expressions, discussions, rights to voice their views and opinions towards the government developmental projects together with involvement in tourism and environmental conservation plans. In the village, the Headman and the Municipality Mayor announce to local residents the subjects to be spoken on and mutually discussed through the public address speakers installed in the village area. Information is not gathered but rather conveyed to the village members and most of the informed messages are from the government sector (e.g. the provincial, district office and its local government). The Headman and the Municipality Mayor persuade the public to take part in the discussion of the plans and projects afterwards.

The next pattern of community involvement, takes place when villagers are given the opportunity to raise their views and opinions during community meetings (Sinclair, 1977). A forum is established for the villagers to share and exchange
information and knowledge. The officials (the staff from Community Development, Public Health, Municipality and other sectors) notify the residents of projects and activities, and invite their involvement in implementing activities and projects. The results are based on the decisions through villagers’ popular votes or public hearings. The flow of information being one way from the notifying process will be two-way in the expression process and it is slightly interactive. This situation was portrayed when the residents were discussing environmental issues (e.g. sea and river pollution caused by sea food factories). The villagers are allowed to initiate debates and discussion on community tourism development plans and other community affairs. However, according to the higher step of the degrees of involvement of ‘degree of tokenism’ Arnstein (1969), describes degree of tokenism as that which allows the public to hear and to have a voice but the public lack the power to ensure that their views will be heeded and if participation is to be restricted (Marsh, 1979). Moreover, a degree of confirmation can be described here in that the form of community participation that takes place when the government sector seeks the village’s confirmation of its own views regarding the compensation policy made by the government for those villagers who have encountered the financial and economic situations affected by the river and sea pollution. In consequence, popular participatory initiatives developed in this case study have frequently established this pattern of participation by only asking and persuading the villagers to become involved in a narrow band of inquiry and issues that are closely connected with the decision that an outside government sector wants to follow. The researcher experienced cases in the consultation process undertaken during various phases of the government projects in Bang Ta Boon Village. Discussion is held for the purpose of receiving reactions and to enable the participants to discuss the issues and to raise questions (Sinclair, 1977). An example is the pattern of community involvement identified through the case of Bang Ta Boon Village and the experiences reported refer to community participation in debating and discussing notions relating to its basic issues (the village’s urgent needs, and other community development projects). The views of villagers or collective opinions are encouraged by the Village Headman and the Municipality Mayor, and it is possible that their voices will influence the authorities. The government sector is still responsible for making
final decisions with the local residents, as experienced from the case study of Bang Ta Boon Village’s plans for tourism development and environmental conservation. It is an example of community involvement of village residents in discussions on issues such as the design of the shoreline tourism landscapes which are favourable to wildlife conservation and their engagement in community tourism and environment conservation plans. At this stage, input from residents is more meaningful to the village and the government planners as the residents would process adequate information for presenting well-formulated briefs (Sinclair, 1977).

A further step on the ladder of participation is one in which the villages, the village members are fully engaged in the decision to be made (Arnstein, 1969). Haworth (1979, pp. 1-11) agrees that ‘a strong community receives participation and willing contributions from each resident and members need to share their ideas in order to establish workable solutions to the challenges they face.’ Hence, the end result of public involvement should be a decision which has taken account of public wishes (Sinclair, 1977). Bang Ta Boon Village was given space and time for discussion and for equal decision-making and input into the planning at the village and municipality halls. This scenario has two typical characteristics: namely that the power of decision lies within the village, but this power is passed to the residents by the community leader; the Village Headman, the Sub-District Administration Organization and the Municipality. The degree of participation is manifest in Bang Ta Boon Village. The tourism planning and environmental conservation process in the village is portrayed in its whale-watching tourism and environmental conservation of the shoreline and mangrove forest conservation projects. In addition, the village-level tourism development and environment conservation plans are developed through a structured participatory process engaging all village members in career workshops, study and educational tours, the village meeting and the public hearing procedures.

The optimum level of community participation is found when communities are able to mobilize themselves to make things happen (Plummer and Taylor, 2004). However, Bang Ta Boon initiates and carries out community tourism and environment conservation plans and has control over the decision-making process. The village accepts the government sector’s development projects through its own decision-
making under public votes and public hearings. During fieldwork in 2012-2014, this pattern was formed in the decision-making process towards the shoreline and mangrove forest conservation projects that is portrayed as a self-conservation phase. It is useful to compare Arnstein’s ladders of participation with the case study analyses undertaken in the context of Bang Ta Boon Village in Phetchaburi, Thailand. When taken into consideration these participatory patterns concerning tourism and environment conservation plans of the village studied, it is clear that community participation varies considerably from situation to situation depending on the priorities (government projects, budgets allocated from the local government and municipality, tourism and environment conservation preparation) the community requires its resident’s urgent decision-making. Through fieldwork observation, community participation is to involve. Smith and Jones (1981) note that from Arnstein’s, getting as high as possible up the ladder on each issue, however, it must also be recognized that in any society some issues must be decided nationally or regionally rather than locally and even at the local level many conflicting factors exist. Thus, the level of attainment up the ladder will vary from issue to issue, and several different levels will co-exist in the same locality on different issues.

The local village members may attend tourism planning and the environmental conservation process during the first step and at the next they may express their opinions. After establishing more confidence and trust, they may join in the discussions and so forth with a more receptive attitude. In addition, it is essential to emphasize how this village can be directed under the yardstick of community participation in tourism and the environmental conservation process, and to draw attention from the village members to circumstances in which citizen involvement is included for this purpose and not only for a share of the benefits from their village’s tourism. In consequence, from the study case and according to Arnstein (1969), most public hearings/forums occurring in the village would fall somewhere in the one-to-four range, which is low-to-middle on the participation scale.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations
The case study strongly agrees with the idea that host communities should be engaged in tourism planning, environmental conservation and other development schemes (e.g. government, local government projects). Community involvement can heighten the possibility for achievement of the projects and to provide opportunities for local residents to anticipate and acknowledge whatever potential there might be to promote the community involvement level. One of the most difficult obstacles to the development of a Western context of popular participation in tourism planning and environmental conservation process in this location is the cultural values. From the report, and according to the tourism and environmental conservation in Bang Ta Boon Village, the community leaders and local government possess the opinion that public sector (e.g. the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the Community Development Office, Marine and Coastal Resources Research and Development Centre-Upper Gulf of Thailand) should pay more attention to and help their village tourism development and environmental conservation and protection. Again, from this case, the Thai government has empowered local government and the local government has empowered the local residents in this village, but tourism in Bang Ta Boon Village is still fully dependent on the help and guidance of their local government as its tourism has just started up since the appearance of whales in the Gulf of Thailand. However, according to the author’s views, the challenge for the Thai tourism industry and environmental conservation policy-makers of today is to make effective use of the range of tools available for obtaining input from the local residents into their decisions while ensuring that they are both responsive to the range of public interests, and that these decisions also achieve effective tourism and environmental policy. This involves obtaining advice from other public, private sectors and academic experts, feedback from the residents, the views of other actors might also improve the participatory and collaborative approach in tourism and the environmental conservation process, and the opinions of other ordinary citizens. Meanwhile, the community needs to ensure that during the planning and conservation process and decision-making the input received from these different groups is balanced against the broader public interest, which may call for a different allocation of resources within both the public/private sectors and the community. If there is to be greater and more effective full
participation, it must take an array of forms which will be suitable for different purposes and have weaknesses and strengths which need to be assessed (Sewell and Coppock, 1977). For Bang Ta Boon Village, all methods utilized to increase community participation involve holding village meetings, repetitive discussions and public hearings/forums prior to the final public conclusions and solutions. Good public information and public consultation processes that provide citizens with the opportunity to become involved, if they wish, or alternatively to allow others to act on their behalf, will continue to be a fundamental underpinning to democratic quality (OECD, 2001). Public hearings and the voting process had a positive impact on this Thai community in increasing the availability of clear information on other sectors, particularly for their tourism and environmental conservation agencies. Nevertheless, the use of these techniques (e.g. community meetings and public hearings/forums) as interactive instruments for greater consultation remains an area for further development.

The decision to launch public consultations/discussions during the preparation of the Community’s Big Cleaning Day and Mangrove Forestation and Protection Campaign has proved to be incongruent with the OECD’s standards, and the information accumulated and distributed in the village represented a useful input into tourism planning and the environmental conservation process. The local residents’ responses were positive, and other sectors involved were motivated and reacted in the public consultation/discussion process. In the community, the issues needed to be expressed in a comprehensible way so as to attract the attention of the local members and others involved. A critical element of any public discussion and public hearings/forums was demonstrated through a clear mechanism for establishing feedback/comments to/from the participating members. Public discussion was a safe way to advocate or contradict any such future government proposed development schemes. In the village, public consultation and discussions were arranged within the community during the preparation of tourism events. Also, proposed government projects were the first large-scale efforts to attract all the sectors as well as the general public into the process of public discussion. The lessons learned from the village during this public discussion together with the communication methods
employed among the participants and general public, and the procedures utilized for
the evaluation of the consultation can become a source of ambition for the
community to arrange discussions on other community’s matters as well. Hence, this
Thailand example more or less portrays certain differences and similarities to a Western
style community involvement.

Further research and application of the participatory approach at other phases
in the community tourism and environmental conservation process, and on other
sites, is needed so as to examine the wider advantages or weaknesses of the
approach. In the studied case, a longer research period would have enabled the
researcher to more directly and indirectly experience more community involvement
and collaborative strategies with other sectors, the role of other additional
organizations which are widely perceived to be part of the strength of community life
but which did not figure strongly in the study’s data sets for Bang Ta Boon Village.
The author’s experience with this case study towards the implication of the
participatory approach suggests that the importance of community involvement
should not be neglected. Community involvement strategies are essential for attaining
an understanding of how to implement active tourism planning and environmental
studies. This study found that a mixed strategy technique (e.g. information distribution,
community meetings/discussions and public forums) is an appropriate method to
evaluate the community’s tourism and its linked interpretation with regard to all
involved actors. This approach ensures that community tourism and the
environmental conservation process and other crucial community issues are
addressed, discussed, debated and conclusions made by the local members. Thus,
this method yields a more holistic report of the elements contributing to the
community’s achievements and failures and an active structure by which other
community tourism can be appraised.

9. Contributions to Knowledge Reviewed

The three significant contributions anticipated arising from this study are: 1.)
the clear pictures of the community participation in community tourism and
environmental conservation process in a rural community of Thailand; 2.) the Western
ideology of public involvement in tourism applied to the studied case (e.g. democratic
ways of public discussion and community forums); and 3.) the residents’ perceptions towards the Western value of participatory approach (e.g. the information distribution). The first one was fulfilled through the on-site survey of the Bang Ta Boon Village, Phetchaburi on community participation in the context of tourism and environmental conservation process. The second one was attained through the association with a literature review and of empirical research designed to collecting the local residents and other sectors’ perception on community involvement in the contexts of developing countries. Not before known perspectives were then extracted and excerpted from what the interviewees narrated and taken into account the literature, the history and practices of popular participation in general backgrounds and in tourism and environmental management. Such notions enabled the researcher to aim at the selection of less quantitative procedures to be used to accumulate the interviewees’ viewpoints on community involvement. This became the reason that the researcher intended to employ more qualitative methods for data collection process so as to obtain more interviewees’ voices and their expressing manners.

Among the most manifested issues that came out into view from the interview transcriptions was the delay in the Government’s budget to support tourism and environmental conservation schemes in the Bang Ta Boon Village. This barrier was affecting the community participation in community tourism planning and environmental management process. However, in this case, this result was not expected prior to the data collection process. This is in congruence with other researchers’ (Tosun, 2000; Timothy, 1998 and Tungchawal, 2010) discoveries in similar studies regarding the red-tape system of the government in the developing countries. And, this case generated a new scene of community participation. Some of the local residents in the Bang Ta Boon Village anticipated that, in order to create an ideal village-tourism destination and enjoy the benefits of it, the participatory approach and cooperation of various sectors were substantially vital. In almost all situations, the collaboration among the public and private sector with the communities was necessary for the attainable community participation of the deprived tourism destinations. More successful strategies should have to be developed to promote community involvement not only in the tourism and environmental conservation but
also in other community matters and the participatory approach has to be maintained as a routine activity. Further, the communities are to help increase their residents’ self-confidence and comprehension of their role and rights in participation and to mitigate the residents’ concern regarding the voice they want to be heard as it is a path of democratic life.

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