



An Approach of the Development of Sustainable Creative Tourism in Santor Community

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed at 1) analyzing the potentialities and its creative tourism management of the San-Tor Community; 2) suggesting an approach in seeking development for sustainable tourism activities of the community. Data were collected from 30 samples through in-depth structured interviews, participant observations, and informal conversations in various contexts; and later were analyzed through Typological Analysis suggested by Schmuck (2006) and Data Triangulation suggested by Patton (2001). The result showed that the Community's potentialities of creative tourism were very apparent, particularly in its unique Thai way of living identity along the canals. These authentic potentialities enabled various activities for creative tourists to experience knowledge learning, share and, simultaneously, transfer cross-cultural experiences. Five suggested approaches for sustainable development included a need for sustainable tourism management team to sustain tourism in the community; an urgent training on knowledge transfer; promoting local people to improve their English use in order to give detailed information, to explain procedures and sharing knowledge for better understanding to tourists; promoting community participation for varieties of activities, ensuring fair income distribution in the community. Santor community would eventually be one of Bangkok's sustainable creative destinations for creative tourists to visit.

Keywords: *Bangkok's creative tourism destination, sustainable development, San-Tor Community*

1. Introduction

Tourism has become the national agenda so as to boost the economic situation especially at the time the country has to cope with the period of critical global economic downturn. As a result, every sector has to turn their eyes onto tourism hoping that it would trigger positive atmosphere of the country's economy as well as a revival of interest or realization of development plans for sustainable tourism. As such the new trend of creative tourism proposed by Richards and Raymond (2000) were adopted and implemented in various destinations in Thailand. Importantly, to ensure success, creative activities had to stem from history, culture, tradition, and way of living of the local people. Hence, activities were authentic and had to be far from being diverted or adapted. These authentic ways of living would be transferred to tourists in the form of various creative activities whereby the creative tourists would learn, do by themselves, share, compare, and even contrast to their own ways of living. The very integral objective of each activity was to give a chance for tourists to do something the very same way as the local people would do. By so doing, tourists could gain direct experiences from the activities they were involved in. The creative tourism, therefore, was considered as a tool to balance the impact of tourism and the direct benefits local people would gain, which could lead to sustainability of tourism in the community (Richards and Raymond, 2000).

The researchers were particularly interested in the creative tourism implemented in the Santor community, Bangkuntien District, a satellite town around the Bangkok Metropolitan area. The community has been known as "Bangkok Beach" because it was located by the sea. People in the community nowadays live in the brackish waters ecology simply in the very same way as their ancestors lived on years and years ago. Without roads or streets, there was no pollution. Every house faced the canals as they were the only transportation channel of the local people. Obviously enough, every house owned a boat as their only form of transportation. In those days, water transportation was considered the traditional way of living and it was the Thai identity of respecting nature, of having faith and having so many traditions attached to "water". This identity has remained till these days because in Santor community, people had preserved their slow



living style, reserved their environment of healthy mangroves, their local culture and tradition, and their *aquaculture* of farming by breeding, rearing, and harvesting of fish, shellfish, and plants without any chemical substances, which had passed down for generations for the respect of nature. This authentic traditional Thai way of living had become the perfectly suitable destination for creative tourism and its activities. However, this destination was at risk of being unsustainable due to unfit tourism management, which was done by any local individual who was ready to find a rented boat to take the tourists around the community and rented parking space inland for tourists' cars while they were taking the tour around the community, as well as having enough ground space at his or her house for activities. These showed that the management in the community lacked fundamental facilities as required by the Tourism Standards for destinations of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (1994). Hence, there should be a suggested guideline for the community to justify so that creative tourism in this community would sustain.

2. Objectives

This qualitative study had two objectives:

1. To analyze potentialities of the creative tourism of the Santor community in Bangkuntien District, Bangkok; and
2. To suggest an approach to develop Santor community as the Bangkok destination for sustainable creative tourism.

Creative Tourism as proposed by Richards and Raymond (2000) was defined as a type of tourism which allowed tourists to participate and involve in creative activities in order to acquire direct experience from the local people. Later in 2006, Binkhorst (2006) considered this creative tourism as new alternative tourism to help build valuable memorable experience through participatory authentic activities, which could enhance even more valuable memorable experience for tourists when visiting that destination. Learning by doing was a great experience in itself, helping to shape value in the things or the activities they had indulged in. The tourists could choose the product, the service or what they really needed and they were particularly interested in. This type of tourism, then, became the tailor-made approach for both the destination and the tourists (Raymond, 2007). Hence, the destination's potentialities were of the prime fundamentals for consideration. There should be numerous tourism resources in the area for it would be possible to come up with more creative tourism activities and at the same time, that destination should have a suitable creative process involving cultural and traditional activities. These activities needed to have local people to transfer knowledge; or that is to say, to give the directions of how to do something, or explain in details the process of so doing. Creative tourism itself, therefore, had transformed culture and tradition from the product for passive consumption to the product which could develop creativities of the tourists. Culture and tradition became stimulators for more learning and sharing among local people and tourists especially of different cultures as Saeng-sanit (2009), Director of Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (Public Organization), advocated that creative tourism had demonstrated its strength because it could generate the value creation and sustainable tourism portraying way of living, local wisdom, and Thainess as a whole. Hence, the development plan for creative tourism had to be prioritized in the National Agenda due to the fact that it served as the main channel for the local people living in that destination to claim their rights as destination "owner" to make a decision of what to do in that community. Local people should seek for community participation to help manage tourism, to help decide on the activities, to help assign knowledgeable people to help transfer knowledge and explain the process so that the tourists could follow the instructions and managed to do the activities. On top of this, sharing of all benefits and especially fair sharing of income for everyone involved had to be considered. As a result, socially responsible tourism would sustain in the destination.



3. Materials and Methods

The Sustainable Creative Tourism in Santor Community of Bangkuntien District in Bangkok was analyzed along the guidelines suggested by Raymond (2007) by first analyzing the potentialities of the destination and the process to run the activities as well as the local people who transferred the knowledge to the tourists. This qualitative study was conducted in Santor community in the district of Bangkuntien with 30 samples comprising of 4 groups: 4 community leaders, 8 local people who were involved with the management of tourism, 6 local people who were not directly involved with tourism, and 12 creative tourists. Data were collected from 3 structured group in-depth interviews, 4 focus group discussions, various occasions of individual interviews as well as informal conversations, and participant observations, particularly with the tourists. Later, data were organized and classified into groups showing both similarities and differences and at the same time show the relation of one another using the guideline of Data Organizing Techniques as suggested by Schmuck (2006). Then, Data Triangulation as suggested by Patton (2001) was employed.

4. Results and Discussion

From the study, Santor community had utmost characteristics for being one of the creative tourism model destinations according to the way Raymond (2007) had described. The very first question whether the destination had cultural and tradition as well as natural tourism resources or not, was obviously clear that there were authenticities in this destination, considering its slow lifestyle, its respect of nature by preserving the environment, and water for their living fundamentals as living consumption and as their integral income from fisheries. The study showed that the destination or the Santor community had its distinctive characteristics of being traditional Thai portraying so many tourism resources depicting culture and tradition well preserved. First of all, when anyone entered into the community, he or she could feel the atmosphere that life here was undoubtedly different from the way most people led their lifestyles. Only some kilometers from the jammed highway, apparently, this community could be considered as a hidden destination in Bangkok Metropolitan Areas. What could be seen were houses built on the stilt floors or the ground levels with structural columns supporting the main structure of the houses without any enclosure. The normal height of each house was about 2 meters from the mud or clay ground level for the purpose of keeping their farm tools, their livestock, and their boat, and at the same time allowing breeze blowing through. This was the living way of local people in the community passing down from generation to generation. Moreover, the community put an emphasis on this living way. In fact, they intentionally preserved their lifestyle by refusing road or street construction in their area. All the canals were clean and clear because the water was consumed as drinking water and daily uses. The community itself was seen enclosed by the main canal and branches of small water channels. The area of natural mangrove in the community had been decreasing due to the erosion by the wind and waves. The community, therefore, decided to make bamboo shaft walls along the mangrove areas to slow down the waves, and to diminish the strength of winds. A few years later, the mangrove became healthier and thicker along the shoreline with a larger number of shrubs and trees in, in salt marshes, and on muddy coasts, in marshes. As a result of this revitalization, the mangrove in the tidal areas around Santor community served as the habitat where several types and species of birds lived, including other living factors of the surrounding environment. Obviously enough, the Santor community was the utmost destination for the study in spite of having numerous potentialities from natural tourism resources, from the cultural way of living, and from the cultural identity of the community. However, the destination was facing the possibility of unsustainability because there was no unity in management within the community. The tourism management was done privately by families who had connections with people outside the community and particularly those who lived inland. That is to say, any family with the capability of receiving the tourists would need time in advance to get ready for all the preparations starting from seeking the parking space on the mainland for tourists before getting on the boat which the "tour operator" had to rent beforehand. So all detailed information such as the number of tourists, the activities they wanted to participate in, the menu for lunch and the like were to be furnished to the operator or the host about two or three days in advance.



What interested the tourists most was the creative activities. Owing to the tourism resources in the community areas, there were many derived creative activities for tourists, namely mangrove tree plantation, bird watching, and the renowned mangrove trekking, including learning about the community's living on chemical-free fisheries and selling chemical-free seafood. The living style here explicitly demonstrated the awareness of the community's health and consumer hygiene and safety. The area around the mangrove forests and the sediments in the canals were free from any chemical contamination, which was in accordance with what Chuaybumrung (2011) had found out that organic fishing or natural fishing was a local wisdom by using only organic or natural food for farming exemplifying the living way of mankind in harmony with nature, which demonstrated the real Thai wisdom embedded in culture and tradition showing the respect of nature leading to sustainability. As Richards and Raymond (2000) had proposed, creative tourists should be able to select which activity triggered their interests most. With the wide varieties of tourism activities to be offered to tourists at Santor, the creative tourism of this community fit what Richards and Raymond (200) tried to describe when they chose one of the creative activities when visiting Chiangmai by choosing to do the Thai massage allowing tourists to practice doing the massage and at the same time interacting with the local people in learning, sharing, comparing and contrasting information on techniques while doing the massage. Creative activities at Santor suited all types of generations— youngsters learning how to harvest cockles, crabs, and mussels, or rowing boats, rowing past the organic breeding ponds of fish and crabs, whereas other generations learned aqua farming, cooking and, preserving seafood, which the tourists could compare and discuss the way of preserving as introduced to them by the local Thai people or the interpreters, in some cases when more explanation needed. This allowed tourists to truly understand the Santor living way. The result of this study was in accordance with the study of Approaches to Develop Creative Tourism in Bang Luang RS 122 Market by Nookaew (2004), in such a way that when there were many activities, the tourists could prolong their stay so as to complete those activities or they could choose which activity suited their interest most. It should also be mentioned that in that study the mouth to mouth information worked best because many tourists visiting Bang Luang from the information given to them by their friends, relatives and particularly their colleagues who tried to find the retreat on weekends. However, for those tourists who wanted to do anything by simply sitting down somewhere in the mangrove forest, they found the trip astonishing and they had memorable experience worth enough for them to have some moment away from hectic living in downtown areas whenever they could spare time as it was the "Spirit of Place" as Bua-ngarm and others (2003) had defined. A place which offered memorable experiences to tourists should be named "Spirit of Place." However, when the tourism management of the community was studied and analyzed, it was found out that the community did not pay much attention to the management. It depended most of the time on who was available or could spare time to render services to tourists. As a result, tourists who wanted to visit Santor needed to arrange time and date in advance so as to find the parking space for their vehicles on land before taking the boat as the only access to the community, to find a boat large enough for the specified number of tourists, and to assign the English interpreter—or any other languages-- if needed. Tourism was done as an additional income to the community, earning the main income from fisheries. At the time when there was no tourist, every family was busy with their fish farming. Therefore, there should be management measures for the community to take in order that tourism would be effectively and systematically managed and ready for every tourist without making an advance reservation. Though there were many activities, poor management could lead to unsustainable tourism. Every local people had accumulated their experiences which were ready for them to share to tourists but somehow, with the lack of responsible leader in tourism management either as a committee or as a representative of a group or the community, tourists had to try to contact individuals who would need time to make preparations to serve tourists after having reservations. These preparations included, first of all, finding the parking space large enough for the number of cars specified; next, renting a long-tailed boat from a person in the community big enough for the indicated number of tourists; then, prepare all activities the group wanted to participate in; lastly, preparing seafood for cooking demonstration at the lunchtime. If there had been a person who could suggest managerial measures for the local people



and support them in forming the management team, the creative tourism in the community would be secured and sustained.

From the study, five urgent plans were to be presented for the community to take in this study. First and foremost was forming a managerial team to manage the whole tourism procedures. This team had to be allocated with responsibilities, namely responsibilities for logistics in facilitating tourists with proper access to and from the community including putting map or signposts or directions to the community, providing parking space for tourists' vehicles, and safety measures while on board with ready to use life vests enough for the number of tourists. These were fundamental facilities for the destination standards (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 1994) at the very first glimpse. Without these, Santor community would become an inaccessible destination. As it was now when the tourists could not contact local people for advance reservation, all they could do was to rent a small long-tailed boat in that vicinity to run around the community wondering what activities they had missed. For the community people, because they could not interact with foreign tourists, it was necessary for them to find some people who could interpret or transfer the information they gave to the tourists. Nevertheless, there was a website of the community with the contact number for the reservation. The other alternative channel to get in touch with the community was by contacting the Office of the Bangkunthien District allowing enough time to get in touch with the community. Another plan for the community was a training project on types of tourism, especially creative tourism. It was quite natural for the local people when any tourists did something wrong such as while harvesting the cockles, they would try to explain to tourists, and at this point, they would use non-verbal communication or gesture trying very hard for the tourists to understand and could perform the task very well, which was quite similar to the study of Taweeng (2012) when studied approaches to develop tourism at the Center for Economic Birds and he proposed that there needed to specify types of tourism of the destination first and then supplied human wares to help make standards with the community's understanding and participating in the development plans, which would ensure success of development. Next, was the plan for disseminating information to the public or tourists both Thais and foreigners. In fact, the community website was created by a tourist who would love for others to have the opportunity to witness the activities of this destination. There should be other channels and other forms for information dissemination on creative tourism for the Santor destination, for example, brochures, leaflets, line, Instagram, and the like. Another important point was the income of members of the community. There should be fair sharing among those who put a lot of efforts on tourism, namely being responsible for some activities especially creating and promoting more creative activities. People participation should be promoted so that everyone in the community could involve in either making plans and implement them, joining the management team, and above all, evaluating the tourism activities, the plans, and the whole project. As a result, new plans could be tailor-made to fit the way of living of the community. Once there was a fair sharing of income, more people would join the tourism activities. And every member should realize that tourism at the moment was the additional income of the community and tourism would not alter or change the way of living of the community. In contrast, tourism could be one of the tools to preserve the living style, the traditions, and the environment of the community. Understanding and realizing the main goal of creative tourism would definitely lure more members of the community to participate in one of the activities or the plans because whenever the people in the community really accepted the idea, they would truly join the community activity, which could be seen constructively from the way they all participated in numerous projects and won several awards-- "Garbage Banking" with the use of "reuse, reduce, and reconstruct waste material" within the community—and particularly being the winner of "Canal Preservation Community" in 2004, "Green Community" in 2013. Apart from these, the destination with numerous resources for creative tourism like Santor destination should not ignore that efficient management would bring in more additional income to the community.

5. Conclusion

Presently, tourism was done as parts. Anyone who received the phone call would get the opportunity to have tourists having members of his or her family as assistants. Unfortunately, only one



group of tourists could visit the destination. This was a very disappointing situation because the community could not serve other tourists who wanted to visit the community. But rather, when there was a management team allocating responsibilities to many small groups in dealing with providing fundamental facilities, leading the tourists for mangrove trekking, explaining the process of some creative activities that tourism would take part in or answering the tourists' questions as well as cooking. The community lost opportunities simply because they did not share that opportunity with others. Sharing and participation among members of the community would create strength in order to preserve their identity, their way of living, and they would realize that the use of natural resources for tourism should be everyone's task. The resources and their lifestyle would sustain once they were aware that the community belonging to all members of that community. Santor had shown their traditional Thai way of living by helping and supporting one another, sharing resources, respecting one another and above all believing that they were of one family. Therefore, at the very first step, there should be an urgent plan for a tourism committee in the community to plan and execute those plans and finally evaluate the plans implemented. The result of the evaluation or the assessment of plans should be used as information for the new plans of the following years. What should be addressed here was that the community should seek some common understanding and support from both the government sectors as well as the private sector in finding parking spaces for the tourists such as from the empty space in some schools, monasteries, and some factories on land opposite the community.

In addition, safety measures would be implemented and especially the training of fundamental English for communication should be necessary. Santor community is part of Bangkok, the city of hectic living; however, the community is a perfect place where anyone who wants to escape from the busy life in downtown areas should visit as a retreat. Definitely, word of mouth will act as one channel of passing on the information that Santor Community is a great place for creative tourism, where tourists can learn new things, share knowledge, and, above all, can participate with the local people and involve in authentic activities. A small community in the suburb of a Metropolitan city, Bangkok, is waiting for all tourists to visit. Therefore, an approach of development of the sustainable creative tourism of this destination was to propose that the community would set up a community committee to oversee the tourism management and recruitment of everyone in the community to participate their ideas, and their energy to help operate tourism. The Committee would be responsible for the tourism in this destination. As a result, everyone in the community will share the benefits. Sustainability will be secured when all members benefitting equal shares of additional incomes, shares of responsibility, and most importantly, shares of having the same identity of Santor community. Sustainability will prevail.

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