

Social Capital in Community Participation for Local Tourism Development: A Case Study of Fisherman Village, Samui Island, Southern of Thailand

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Abstract

In Thailand, as other developing countries, tourism is a sector that plays a vital role in socio-economic development for the country. Considering Samui Island, one of a famous beach destination in Thailand, tourism has significant effects on the local community. The island has faced various problems caused by inappropriate planning for rapid tourism growth. To reduce the negative impacts of tourism, a community participation approach has been applied in response to local problems and needs in tourism development with the aim of creating long term sustainability. This paper aims to explore and discuss the pattern of community participatory approach initiated by a small local community located in Samui Island called Fisherman village, one of main local tourist destination. The case study shows how community participation was conducted and organized by the local people who were acknowledged as natives and non-natives. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analyses were applied in this research. In the case study, there was an innovative approach of adapting the concept of community participation into diversified local conditions. Consequently, results show that social capital strongly contributed to community participation through mobilizing people for their participation in local tourism development.

Keywords: Community participation, social capital, Thailand, tourism development

1. Introduction

Along the rapid development of tourism sector with contribution to economic growth in Thailand accounting for 6.4% of GDP in 2007 (TAT, 2008), unfortunately, it also has negative impacts on local communities in various aspect including environment and socio-culture as also appeared in many studies (Singh, 1989; Harrison, 1992; Parnwell, 1993;

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Oppermann, 1993; ICLEI, 1999; Abbott, 1995; Jamal, 1995; Aronsson, 2000; Ashley, 2001; Jamieson, 2001; and Guysoy, 2004).

Samui Island, likewise, is facing problems from tourism development. More than three decades that Samui has developed from a backpacker tourist destination into one of the most increasingly upscale tourist destination in Thailand. Pressures are exerted on households and communities by rises in the cost of land, food and general household items (Community News, 2005). There are many multinational enterprises and foreign corporations invest in Samui Island which threatens local owned small business. Moreover, Samui Island is actually vulnerable to overpopulation whether by permanent or temporary stay. Problem of insufficient water supplies especially during dry season which is also a peak season for tourism. Short term solutions for this problem include digging more wells and draining the water from which finally leads to environmental problems in the island (Pongponrat, 2006).

In general, this research aims to understand community participatory approach applied in response to local problems and needs of the study area once tourism development effect significantly on local community. Factors influencing people to participate in participatory development projects were also identified. The research was conducted in Fisherman village, Bo Phut sub-district in Samui Island. A standardized questionnaire was employed to collect data from participants in local tourism development. Other primary data collection methods included key informants interviews and focus group discussions using a case-study approach. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were applied in this research.

The results show that community participation for local tourism development in the case study was conducted and organized by local people who were acknowledged as native Samui and foreigners who move to open business in the area. There was an innovative approach of adapting the concept of participation into diversified local conditions. Role of leader and cooperating among tourism stakeholders were addressed as main mechanism imperative for the success of the participatory development. Social capital was significantly addressed as main factor to mobilize people for their participation. As community participation is one of the mechanisms that has been applied in various development stages of local tourism planning. It could respond to people's problems and needs and thus improve their quality of life and their community in avoiding of negative effects of tourism.

2. Methodology and Respondents

The study area was located in Samui Island or Koh Samui in Thai (Figure 1). It is

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located in the South of Thailand, addressed as Thailand's third-largest island, occupying a total area of 252 sq. km, and is surrounded by 52 smaller islands. A review of historical settlement of Samui Island revealed that there was diversity of ethnics groups settled in this island such as Malay or Chinese. However, people who originally were born in Samui Island preferred themselves to be called as "chao Samui" (Samui folk). At present, Samui has a total population of 42,047 persons, but the local government indicates that there might be as many as 50,000 additional inhabitants actually living in this area without registration due to high rate of migration to work in Samui Island (Pongponrat, 2006). There are 18,368 households in 39 villages in 7 Tambons (sub-districts). Prior to 1990, Samui Island was a small community depends on coconut production and fishing. After tourism started booming in 1990, Samui's main source of income shifted to tourism, which brought about many changes toward modernization as a consequence. This can be seen from the infrastructural improvements, including roads, sewage systems, hotels, and resorts. In 2003, 853,475 tourists visited Samui Island, and there are now 298 resorts and hotels with more than 14,405 rooms available (TAT, 2008).

Fisherman village in Bo Phut sub-district was selected as a study area. This community is one of oldest communities on the island and still maintains the atmosphere of a sleepy fisherman village which consists of crescent-shape beach, ramshackle pier, and charming wooden shops and houses.

Fisherman village consists of total of 829 registered households. The questionnaire survey was applied to 30 households as respondents to obtain local people's perception and to examine factors those associated with their participation. Case study analysis, key informant interview, field observation, and focus group discussion were also conducted for deeper understanding and different perceptions of local people on the issues.

This case study showed significant initiative of local people in the study area. The local group known as "Bo Phut Group" (BPG) was formed in response to increase economic benefits from local tourism development. Members of the group were homogenous as they were the owners of tourism business in this Bo Phut community consisting of both native Samui and foreigners.

Considering of respondents of this study, majority of the respondents were male and more than half of respondents were between the ages of 21-40 with an average of 36 years indicating their participation more than senior ones. The finding shows that more than half of all of the respondents had obtained secondary level of education (60%) and they were single status (60%). With development of the tourist destination, there was a high rate of in-migration to Samui Island searching for opportunity of occupation in this island. The findings show that majority of respondents were non-native Samui (60%) and they have lived in Fisherman village only between 1 to 8 years (56.7%). Almost half of

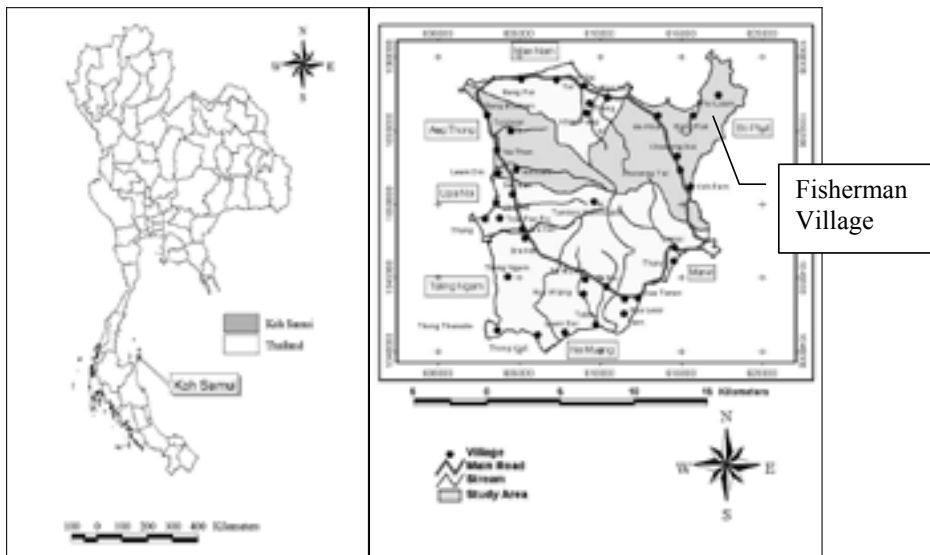


Figure 1: Thailand, Samui Island and Study Area

respondents were engaging in trading (44%) with average income of 180,533 Thai Baht annually (1 US \$ is equivalent to 34 Baht, 2009).

3. Community Participatory Approach in Tourism Development

Community participation accompanies various approaches including decentralization, local democratization, spreading decision-making among local organizations, community involvement, and civil society debate (Post, 1997; Foret, 2001; Sanoff, 2000; and Jalali, 2002). Community participation usually begins with a bottom-up approach involving major stakeholder groups. The process is initiated through a government commitment to devolve some power to the community, and the community's recognition of the need to manage local areas (Kay & Alder, 1999). Community participation is a form of grass-roots democracy, where people have a right to participate in decision-making on the matters that directly affect their life. Simmons (1994) confirmed that a community's right to participate in the planning of activities that affect their daily lives is now a widely accepted principle.

The notion of community participation in tourism planning as a generator for community development has grown from the desire to make tourism development more sensitive to the needs of local community. There is a need to bring government and local people together to increase understanding and allow the exchange of ideas. Jamieson

(2001) points out that local people citizenry can get involved directly in the tourism planning process via committees or workshops, and indirectly through public meetings, surveys and the like. Direct participation in tourism-related projects also creates a sense of ownership in the outcome of the process. Further, participation may also allow the benefits of tourism to be distributed more widely among community members. Murphy confirmed that concept of community involvement in tourism development has moved closer to the idea of sustainability (Murphy, 1985 cited in Taylor, 1995).

The latest approach to community participation in tourism development revolves around the concept of community-based sustainable tourism (CBST). This was developed as a way to overcome or minimize the negative effects of tourism in remote, rural areas. CBST was developed as a form of tourism aimed at empowering local communities to be self-reliant, use a group process for local decision-making, support people's human rights and capabilities and help people to raise income and improve their standard of living on their own terms. Local knowledge, community participation, support for local capabilities and cultural exchange with tourists would help to sustain both cultural and natural resources (UNESCAP, 2001).

As local tourism development requires people who are affected by tourism to be involved in both the planning process and the implementation of policies and action plans. It is recognized by the bottom-up approach that planning emphasizes the contributions of stakeholders, plans with local people and takes local needs into account known as "participatory planning approach" The outcome of participatory planning is likely to live far longer since people identify with the project and see the project as belonging to them. Given the potential sustainability of the outcome of participatory planning process, the bottom-up approach is often recommended (Conyers & Hills, 1984; NDPC, 2002; and Mensah, 2005).

4. Fisherman Village and Local Tourism Participatory Planning Process

Although the two-kilometers beach of Bo Phut area, one of district in Samui island, is much quieter than the popular beach like Chaweng and Lamai where are density of tourist activities, local life in this community also changed a lot since tourism booming in the island. Many foreigners especially from Europe have come to live and run business in Bo Phut, especially from the past five years. Therefore, this area is mixed with an old traditional architecture style and the modern one influenced from newcomers. People who live here open some small business for tourism such as restaurant, bars, cafes, guesthouse, diving business, and also tour agency. This is a distinctive area that mixes of native Samui and foreigners stay together in harmony within the community. The native

Samui are happy to share their good experience with outsiders and willing to give their properties for rent. Thus they keep their land in their families. They have a lesson-learned from other developed beach in the island that they should learn to live well without selling their property for a big money, unlike other local people in other area of the island that sell their land for big investor from outsiders. Fisherman village still maintains the old traditions such as “Nora Jongdee” which is a ritual in the seventh month of the year to expel all badluck from the village. Remaining of old traditional style of living is one of a significant factor to attract tourists for this community.

To promote tourism within this area, there is a setting up of Bo Phut Group (BPG). The leader of the group is environmental activist. He is native Samui and also owns a restaurant in this area. The group has 90 members consisting of local enterprise owners who are both native and foreigners. There are 12 committees to manage the group and to create tourism activities to promote tourism in this area. The budget of group’s activities comes co-funding among local enterprise and donation of local people in community.

Generally, objectives of BPG group formulation are to conserve the environment around a community’s area as well as to raise awareness of local people to take responsible for their community. BPG also aims to promote the cooperation among the community for creating tourism development activities which can support community’s self-reliance via tourism development. In this sense, income generating for community can be increases along with preserving old traditional and culture. To set up a board for consulting for the problems and other issues happen in the community is included as main objective of group formulation. As the significant characteristic of Fisherman village is there is a small street with several shops along the street, BPG tries to create a walking street to promote tourism around the area. In year 2005, they pursued one-way driving on this street and will reach a walking street without car driving along the street in the future.

BPG set up activity to promote tourism in local community once a year. The activity aims to pursue cooperation among local people which include both native Samui and foreigners who live or own business there. One of the activity is known as “Fisherman Villager Festival”. Local people especially committee of the group will get together to discussion and search for a plan to carry on an identified activity. They are planning process to finalize the plan, implementing the project, and also evaluation the output of the project. The festival will be set within the community’s public area such as community public park or beach. There are several shops and booths to sell local stuffs, souvenirs, or even traditional goods and foods. These kinds of shops and booths set up by villagers and others who interest to participate in the festival but mostly are local people who live in the community involved in the project. Performance of local shows also performs by local people to promote local traditional and culture. Moreover, during the festival, there are a

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lot of games that local people, visitors, and tourists can join together in the games that somehow present Samui's life style and culture.

There is a strong local group with a strong leader to lead a participatory activity in local community. People who join the meeting mostly know each other and also respect the leader of the group. Therefore, this can also be recognized as an induced participation since people participate because of a persuasion of familiar people, relative, and also friends. There is a direct participation since local people directly involved in the meeting to give information, idea, and comment directly to a committee and members. An indirect participation appears when there is a process of finalizing ideas to create concrete plan and to search for outside supporting which normally a group get supporting from private sectors such as beverage company and airline company. This process will be carried out by group committee.

Regards the decision-making process, there were many concerns raised in the meeting process to clarify problems and needs, analysis present situation and potential of tourism development, and also define development plans. After the plan was finalized, the participatory activities are ready for an implementation. For the early stage of implementation, a committee will call for a meeting again to inform a process of activity and distribute works to right person. Tasks of the activity may consist of public relation to promote the activity, organize a place and create a suitable environment for a festival, contact related organization to get supporting, and also prepare performances, shows, and games for the festival. This can be an organizing period. Local people can be involved in the activity via participate in organizing period to carry out some tasks that they have ability to do. Local people can be involved in this period during the festival days. They can set up their small shops or booths to sell local products to visitors and tourists within the festival area. Additional condition is stuffs which can be sold in the festival must be related to local culture and tradition such as things which made from coconut, local food and others. There is no charge for a fee to open a small shops and booths for original local people who live in a community but there is a charge for a fee for non-local people who not live in a community.

During the festival, there are a lot of performances and shows which perform by local people to promote local traditions and cultures, and games that local people, visitors, and tourists can enjoy together. This is to promote friendly community for local tourism development. The contribution of the implementation process was occurred in different manners which depend on many factors such as personal satisfying, laws forced or even both. These matters related to the ways of contribution that people practiced in the implementation process in local tourism development planning.

The participatory activity was monitored and evaluated by group committee. There

is informal meeting to evaluate the activity to search for problems and constraints. Unfortunately, these informal meetings, other people have less chance to participate in this process, therefore, it appears as indirect participation via the group committee as a representative of local people. Figure 2 shows participatory planning process occurred in this group.

As the study explored the factors influencing people’s participation for their tourism development, the results show that there were eight factors influenced the intensity of people’s participation in BPG. Details are discussed hereunder (Table 1).

The results show that people participated actively if they received benefits in environmental conservation from the participatory activity. Within BPG, this indicator had a relationship with people’s participation overall, and in the decision-making and implementation process. This was due to the fact that people received benefits on their participation through community participatory activity which provided enhancing of environmental conservation for their community.

People participated actively if they were satisfied with the degree of preservation of local tradition and culture through participatory activity. Within BPG, the participatory planning process promoted local tradition and culture in the interest of the main source of income for the community, namely, tourism. This indicator was associated with the intensity of people’s participation overall, and in the decision-making and implementation phases of the “Fisherman’s Village Festival”. This was due to the fact that people

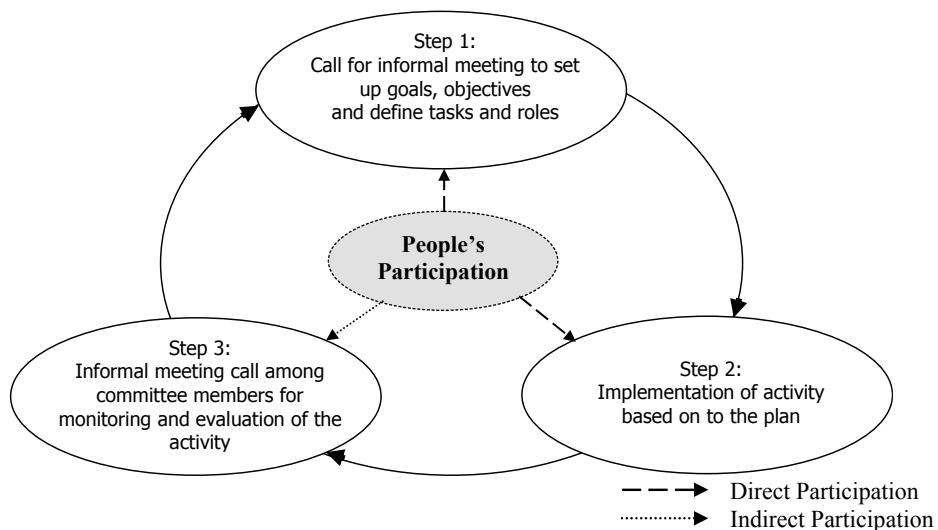


Figure 2: Participatory Planning Process of BPG

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Table 1: Factors Influenced with the Intensity of People’s Participation in BPG

Factors	Correlation Coefficient (CC)			
	Overall planning process	Decision- making process	Implementation process	Monitoring And Evaluation process
Degree of Benefits Gained on Environmental Conservation	0.478*	0.288*	0.409*	0.056
Degree of Satisfaction with Preserving Local Tradition and Culture	0.312*	0.364*	0.211*	0.000
Occupation of Respondents	0.298*	0.238*	0.392*	0.096
Degree of Benefits Gained in Increased Productivity	0.111	0.034	0.382*	0.180
Degree of Satisfaction with Increased Capacity Building	0.015	0.229*	0.380*	0.035
Degree of Satisfaction with Increased Productivity	0.108	0.012	0.374*	0.216
Degree of Satisfaction on Environment on Conservation	0.102	0.245	0.154	0.371*
Awareness of Respondents on Community Participation	0.007	0.084	0.167	0.364*

Note: * = Significant at the 0.05 level confidence, ** = Significant at the 0.01 level confidence.
 Criteria for Calculation: Correlation Coefficient (CC) less than 0.00–0.29 is a low-level correlation, 0.30–0.59 is a moderate level correlation, and more than 0.60–1.00 is a high level correlation.

participated actively if they feel that their local tradition and culture can be preserved through the participatory activity which will provide social benefits for their community.

Occupation was related with the intensity of people’s participation overall, and in the decision-making and implementation process since most respondents were engaged in trading which they were more frequently than those engaged in other occupations.

The degree of benefits gained in increased productivity had a relationship with people’s participation in the implementation process. People participated actively if they gained benefit on this issue. Within BPG, the participatory planning process provided benefits in increased productivity since those who participated could increase their productivity related to tourism if they could improve their community participation to serve tourism which provides income generation for the local community.

The degree of satisfaction with capacity building was also one factor associated with people’s participation in the decision-making and implementation process since local

people can increase their capacity to plan and organize activities in their own community. This also improves their ability to mobilize the community for community development tasks. People participate actively if they are satisfied with capacity building for themselves and their community.

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Degree of satisfaction on environmental conservation had a relationship with people's participation in monitoring and evaluation process. People participate actively if they are satisfied on this issue. This may be due to the fact that people are satisfied on their participation through community participatory activity which provides environmental conservation for their community then they will participate actively in the activity.

5. Discussion

BPG was willing to promote their community as local tourism destination for their income generating purpose. The group used its significant of typically local lifestyle with a distinctive mixture of natives and foreigners staying as neighbors of each other. Based on the study, the findings indicate that "Fisherman village" where local people also called "Bo Phut village", it is actually one of the oldest communities of Samui Island which still remains wooden shops and houses with doors open to the sea. Since tourism booming lead to increase number of foreigners to run some business around this area, native people prefer to rent their house or their land more than selling it to foreigners like other villagers did in other tourism areas. There is a positive sign that foreigners who live around this area also prefer to preserve the traditional architecture and natural scenery to be remained. Therefore, foreigners, who rent a house from native Samui will do not change any textures of traditional house. For those who would like to construct a new house, they will design a house to match with local style. This village is getting more popular for a peaceful with nice scenery village which many tourists are interesting to visit to see a unique style of this village.

From discussion with a group of senior native Samuis who live in this area more than 50 years, they mentioned that they like the good old days of this village but in the same time development has created many good things for villagers such as income generation. This is one of an example of the comments from native Samuis that local

villagers can live with foreigners without discrimination issues.

The study found that the participatory planning process of BPG was a flexible process. This takes less time consuming procedure since they were informal style through a whole process. This caused by close relationship among people of the group which consisting of both committee and members who was interesting to participate in a main purpose of income generating and local traditional and environmental preservation. As the study found that, mostly, people in this group were friends both identified as natives and foreigners who engage in tourism business. They have a same common that to create a plan for income generating for themselves and community. This lead to the easier of group forming and even of calling of getting together to carry out some tasks. This matter were supporting by trust and great respect of each other among the group with a common needs. Based on the study, since people was willing to get in the group caused by their relationship with the same willing without forcing from anyone, therefore, there was induce participation with their voluntariness. Remarkable that the group has a main focus on economic benefits along with preservation of local traditional and environmental as social benefits as minor goal, therefore, people who participated within this group engaged in tourism related business.

There was an initiated of “bottom-up approach” to provide a chance for local people to participate for local tourism development in context of initiated of decision-making by committee of the group who are called local people whether they were identified as natives or foreigners. The implementing and benefit-sharing also be carried out via this people. As leadership is a need for community participation, a committee of the group acted as an informal leader body. Mostly, committee of this group consisting of friends and respect person in community who engaged in business related to tourism such as guesthouse, restaurant, pub, shopping store, tour agency, or even diving schools. This kind of leadership has implicit power to control or to require participation from others in reason of income generating idea that most people in this community are interesting. Regards the structure that holding people together for participatory practice within this case study, “close-tie networks” addressed by Patulny (2003) could show the perspective of relationship among the group that there were relationships with friends and neighbors get together to do something useful for their community.

Power structure is an element that underpins participation process. Its influence was translated to mean something more akin to “participation” (Jones, 2005). Considering in BPG, a first former of the group was native Samui who own a restaurant in this community. He had an idea of creating Fisherman village for tourism destination. Therefore, he set up this group which has native Samui people as a committee and foreigners who run business around this area as committee and members. The leader of

this group, who has a strong conservative perspective, is originally born in this area. He stays here for many years and being well-known as an activist who usually carried out activity for community. Therefore, it is not too difficult to call for participatory activity initiated by him from people who have a same interesting as the small personalized networks in community has traditionally been seen as closed and bonded in some respects (Macbeth et al, 2004).

BPG believes that if community can be managed and be organized, it will help to be sustain community as a local tourism destination where tourist keep coming more and more to see a unique style of living here. BPG receive a well-participating from foreigners. This may lead from the knowledge of foreigners who mostly from western where participation practicing occurred from historical period. This people must have knowledge and understanding of participation context as a tool for community development. They are easily to understand what the group try to do and will ready to participate as they realize on its useful. Foreigners also provide some idea to set up community magazine to promote their fisherman village for tourism. This shows a willing of participation in community development among different stakeholders which were pulled to get along by economic stimulated factor. As there was a significant mixture of natives and foreigners who live and run businesses in this area, however, social ties that are helpful in some circumstances may be constraining in others. It needs to be balanced by connections made beyond the local group to the broader economy and society. In BPG, the power influencing on participation occurred through respect and trust of the leader. This is related to the significance of social capital which was addressed as a part of the relation of power within a social system and recognizes that different groups within a social system can have different types of social capital. It also recognizes that social capital must be viewed contextually because it is embedded within structures of power and can be used to facilitate collective action for the common good or to perpetuate symbolic or actual violence against others (Mansuri & Rao, 2004).

The core idea of social capital is that social networks have value; as interaction and connections develop shared norms, and trust; that in turn foster cooperation to achieve common ends (Jones, 2005). The critical issue is components of social capital defined by Harpham et al. (2002) which consists of both structural and cognitive component. Norms, values and institutions are thus seen as ways of sharing and obtaining information, coordinating action and making collective decisions (Grootaert, 1999). The findings from case study imply that participatory approach in this group appear as cognitive components of social capital since they include norms, values, attitudes and beliefs, perceptions of support, sharing, and trust. Therefore, it relates to what people 'feel' (Harpham et al., 2002) that they want to be involved which is different from 'must be involved in

participatory development projects.

However, though the group was successful in organizing the “Fisherman’s Village Festival”, there were still some problems in the planning process. Major difficulties found from the study are lack of support from local government for both technical and financial support. There is no linkage between a group of local community and local government for cooperative work. Moreover, there are some villagers did not understand the reasons for participation and were not aware of its benefits. This led to limit numbers of people to participate for the participatory development projects. All constraints are needed to be discussed to improve effective of community participation to sustain their local community while promote tourism development.

6. Conclusion

BPG was set up informally by local people who gave concerns to their community. Its main objectives are to promote local tourism development planning via people’s participation and to have more concern on preservation of local traditional and culture. The study provides a framework of participatory planning process of the group. The case shows a significant of native people and foreigners stay together in the same community context. They also get together to pursue participatory planning process via different activities which all aim to promote their community as a tourism destination. The leader of the group is the native Samui who can get along with foreigners and have some implicit power to call for people’s participation for their community. The group has capacity to pursue activities since members understand the meaning of participation. This may due to educated members from western. Based on the study, BPG has a potential of sustainability of participatory planning process since the group is try to implement new idea or activity from time to time and getting more famous via their created activities. This matter was assured by the knowledge and understanding of committee of the group and members who were both natives and foreigners and the remaining of an implicit power to mobilize other people to join the group.

BPG has the potential to develop a sustainable participatory planning process since the group tried to implement new ideas and activities from time to time and appears to be getting more popular. The knowledge and understanding of committee members and general members remain to encourage people to participate.

A significant feature of the case study was the cooperation between native people and foreigners living in the same neighborhood. They were able to get together to pursue a participatory planning process to promote their community as a tourism destination. The leader of the group was a native Samui who could get along with foreigners and had

some implicit power to call for community participation. The group had the capacity to pursue activities since members understood the rationale of participation. This may be due to the good level of education of both native and westerners. BPG has the potential for sustainable participatory planning since the group tried to implement new ideas and activities from time to time and was becoming more popular as a result. The sustainability of the group was assured by the knowledge and understanding of the committee and its members. The effectiveness of the group was achieved through sustainable process whereby local people could have initiatives and capacity to continue the participatory planning process for community development.

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