

Human Capital Development and Psychology towards Empowering Orang Asli Jakun for Community based Ecotourism

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Received: 15- June -2023

Revised: 12- July -2023

Accepted: 10- August -2023

Abstract

Community-based tourism is recognized as a catalyst for rural community development. The location of Orang Asli Jakun Kg Peta, is close to Endau Rompin National Park, which is the second largest national park in peninsular Malaysia, which certainly makes this community very relevant to eco-tourism activities. Although the community has been involved in tourism activities, the success of the project to empower the community is still at a moderate level, especially in generating economic activity. The issue of human capital development is an important focus for ensuring community readiness and the ability to plan and operate tourism activities. Thus, this study was conducted to obtain feedback from community members on human capital development, including the courses needed by those involved in tourism development and the approach of the training. This study was conducted using a qualitative approach, where semi-structured interviews were used as a data collection method. A total of six key informants were selected for this study, and the data from the interviews was analyzed using the thematic analysis method. The results of this study found that the majority of participants agreed that the development of eco-tourism is acknowledged to play a role in opening up new economic opportunities for the local community, although the program of building awareness about the impact of tourism on the community from economic, environmental, and cultural aspects needs to be further intensified. Koperasi Jakun Asli Peta Mersing Berhad was successfully established in 2017 with a membership of 65. Respondents stated that although the cooperative has been successfully established as a community-owned business entity, the activities carried out by the cooperative are still lacking due to Malaysia being hit by the COVID pandemic starting in 2020 and lasting until 2022, and now it has shown a change in terms of tourist arrivals. The result of the study acknowledged the need for cooperative leadership courses such as organizational management and administration, marketing, product and package development, preparation of financial proposals, technology, including digital, quality of service delivery, knowledge about the tourism industry, the impact of tourism, and soft skills courses such as English communication, negotiation, decision-making, network and partnership, and so on. The courses offered also need to be based on the level of competence, not one-off, and need to be certified. This study also revealed the need for a training approach that is more hands-on and based on experience, or experiential learning. The conclusion of this study is that human capital development is a critical component in determining the ability of community members to be actively involved in the planning and development of community tourism. The preparation of a bottom-up course, which is based on the needs of the community, needs to be given attention in course planning by the government agencies involved.

Keywords: Human Capital, Empowering, Community-Based Ecotourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Community-based tourism (CBT) is an alternative form of tourism in which local communities are actively involved in the planning, development, management, and rewards of tourist operations. It emphasizes local inhabitants' empowerment and the long-term development of their communities, taking into account economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors. Tourist activities are not new; numerous governments throughout the globe support the tourist sector to achieve economic development. Many regions in Malaysia's rural areas with

distinctive natural characteristics are being researched and exploited for tourist reasons (Zuliskandar et al. 2015:471). According to the Malaysian Tourism Board (Malaysia Tourism Board), the tourism activity sector recorded a 2.4 percent increase in tourism income in 2019, totaling RM86.14 billion, which can contribute to the improvement of the national economy while also creating job opportunities (Bernama, 2020).

Community-based tourism (CBT) emphasizes the active participation of local communities in tourist planning, management, and benefitting. CBT may assist communities in a variety of ways, including economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation. In the context of Orang Asli Malaysia, CBT may be a viable alternative economic activity that promotes their culture and adds to their general well-being. After a lengthy period of shutting down all tourist activity sectors to combat the spread of the COVID-19 illness, the Malaysian Tourist Promotion Board (Tourism Malaysia) announced the reopening of the tourism industry inside the nation on September 16, 2021. For example, the tourism activity sector on Langkawi Island, which just opened, recorded the presence of 38,748 visitors in the nation and achieved a profit of RM15.97 million (Datuk Seri Nancy Syukri, ASEAN Forum 2021). Meanwhile, in the state of Sabah, the number of tourist visits decreased by 85.2%, with just 108,862 visitors arriving from January to June 2021, compared to 2020. During the same time period, a total of 736,921 visitor arrivals were registered, however, they were unable to compete with the 4.2 million tourists who arrived in 2019.

The preservation of ecotourism in Malaysia is critical for the country's long-term growth and the protection of its diverse biodiversity. Ecotourism is defined as responsible travel to natural regions that conserves the environment, supports the well-being of local people, and offers tourists educational opportunities. The tourism sector, including CBT is a profitable industry not only from an economic standpoint for a country, but it is also capable of improving the socioeconomic level and meeting the needs of human resources with the workforce that exists in this industry (Habibah, 1994; Safura, 2015; Yahaya, 2006; Kayoko, 2011; Ernawati et al., 2018). In a nation like Malaysia, the tourism industry is becoming more essential due to its potential for economic development in terms of revenue and economic growth (Noor Azrina, 2008), including for rural populations. Despite the fact that tourism has the potential to benefit communities as well as bring long-term social, economic, and cultural benefits, many programs have failed to deliver on their promises (Seweryn, 2020).

1. ECO TOURISM IN ENDAU ROMPIN NATIONAL PARK

Ecotourism is a kind of tourism that encourages responsible travel to natural regions with a focus on environmental protection, community participation, and cultural preservation. It aims to reduce negative environmental consequences while maximizing positive benefits for local residents and ecosystems. Ecotourism is often defined by its emphasis on sustainability, education, and respect for nature. It offered numerous advantages to the country and local community, but it may also have had a detrimental influence on the environment and local culture. Ecotourism is described as responsible travel to natural areas that preserves the environment, improves the well-being of locals, and provides educational opportunities to visitors. Aside from that, not all visitors understand the significance of environmental preservation. The development of ecotourism in Malaysia is crucial for the country's long-term prosperity and biodiversity conservation.

For Malaysia to continue growing over the long term and to safeguard its rich biodiversity, ecotourism must be preserved. According to Shoo & Songorwa (2013), ecotourism is defined as ethical travel to undeveloped areas that promotes local communities' well-being, protects the environment, and provides educational opportunities for visitors. There are some crucial points highlighting the value of preserving ecotourism in Malaysia and raising awareness about it, such as cultural preservation, which involves interactions with indigenous communities that have strong ties to the land and its traditions. Ecotourism in Malaysia frequently involves these kinds of interactions. Supporting ecotourism gives local communities the chance to engage tourists in conversation about their cultural history, folklore, and environmentally friendly practices. As a result, local communities are strengthened, and cultural preservation is encouraged (WTO, 2015).

Apart from that, ecotourism also plays an important role in contributing to the local economy by establishing employment and generating income for local people. By supporting sustainable tourism practices, visitors can contribute to the equitable distribution of economic benefits among local communities. This, in turn, reduces destitution, encourages locals to actively participate in protecting their natural environment, and, at the same time, can establish a long-term, sustainable tourism industry that benefits both the environment and the economy. It ensures that natural attractions and resources are not exploited or depleted but rather conserved and managed responsibly. This sustainable approach enables future generations to enjoy the country's natural wonders and supports the ongoing protection of its ecosystems.

In Malaysia, Ecotourism is developed by Orang Asli Jakun in Endau-Rompin National Park, a protected area in the southern portion of Peninsular Malaysia. It is well-known for its different habitats, cascades, rivers, and animals, as well as its rich biodiversity. Endau-Rompin National Park benefits from ecotourism development because it encourages sustainable tourist practices that focus on environmental protection, community engagement, and education. Malaysia has one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world, including rainforests, mountains, mangroves, swamps, coral reefs, and caverns. As a result, Malaysia is regarded as one of the top ecotourism locations (Markr et al., 2008). Ecotourism is gaining popularity among government agencies and private sector businesses since it helps economic development by producing more cash and creating more employment while preserving nature and the environment (WTO, 2015). Endau-Rompin National Park ecotourism promotes sustainable tourism practices that help conserve the park's various ecosystems while also offering tourists unique and instructive experiences.

The culture of the locals or natives may be impacted by their ability to sustain their ecology and may attract visitors to help develop the income of their community. Native villagers engage in a variety of subsistence economic activities, including working in rubber plantations, becoming tour boat operators, nature guides, or tourist guides with natural skills, working with the National Park, and etc. Villagers are also aware of the need to protect their source of income from natural catastrophes and foreign economic challenges (Hussain Osman, 2018). As a result, it can build a long-term, sustainable tourist business that benefits both the environment and the economy. It guarantees that natural resources and attractions are not exploited or exhausted, but rather protected and appropriately maintained. This long-term strategy ensures that future generations may enjoy the country's natural treasures while also supporting the continuous maintenance of its ecosystems.

2. PARTICIPATIONS OF LOCAL PEOPLE

Clearly, some individuals have already learned how to live in balance with their available resources. Sadly, these people are now considered "primitive", despite the fact that their technology has successfully sustained their society for hundreds of generations. Few would argue that such individuals should be kept in a 'primitive' state if they wish to join the modern 'television society'. Indigenous peoples' engagement in ecotourism has various benefits, but there are several challenges that must be overcome in order to ensure indigenous communities' well-being and rights. In this case, the local people are from the Jakun ethnic community in Endau Rompin (Arif, 2020). Jakun is a tribal community of Proto-Malay ancestry. Linguistic and archaeological data indicate that the first Proto-Malay speakers emerged in Taiwan between 4000 and 3000 BC. This migration passed via the Philippines on its way to Borneo, Sulawesi, Central Java, and Eastern Indonesia (Leonard, 2001, p. 316). The Jakun group is said to have a substantial heritage from Yunan in southern China and to have begun migrating 5,000 years ago. The first Jakun communities were scattered over the Endau River valley. The Jakun community in Kampung Peta is home to around 220 people and 67 households, accounting for 2% of all Orang Asli in Johor (Siti Fatimah Sabran, 2016).

Some of the issues and challenges that affect sustaining ecotourism in Endau Rompin involve the level of skills possessed by the natives there. The issue discussed is related to cultural appropriation, where the commercialization of indigenous culture for tourism purposes can lead to cultural appropriation. Indigenous traditions, ceremonies, and artifacts may be commodified without proper consent, respect, or benefit to the communities (Kosmo, 2021). It is crucial to promote cultural sensitivity, respect indigenous knowledge, and ensure that indigenous communities have control over the representation and commercialization of their culture.

Apart from that, issues related to sustainable resource management are also discussed in the indigenous community. Indigenous communities often have a strong connection to the land and a deep respect for its resources. Their traditional practices often incorporate sustainable management techniques that have been passed down from generation to generation. However, they still have not mastered the skills in training that they have acquired to be introduced and included in the tourism sector to generate the economy (Selangor Kini, 2019). By involving indigenous people in ecotourism planning and management, their traditional practices can be integrated into sustainable tourism practices, ensuring the long-term conservation of forests and their resources. The Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) also sees that the ecotourism approach from communities with management skills is a sector that is becoming a new economic source that is becoming increasingly popular in addition to being a tourist attraction, thus being seen as able to provide opportunities for residents to earn income and create job opportunities.

Now, the Orang Asli community is no longer fully dependent on a subsistence economy based on forest resources to continue their daily lives (Zanisah Man & Yeh 2019). Due to the decreasing forest area, increasing population, and limited food resources, self-sustaining economic systems such as collecting forest products and

hunting wild animals are unable to be done more often. Thus, eco-tourism activities can at least open opportunities for the Orang Asli community to earn income and gain experience in managing socioeconomic activities based on the skills and abilities they possess (Goodwin 2007). Based on a study conducted by Aminah & Wee (2014), the high level of awareness among tourists is not only found in the aspect of nature, but it also involves training in the development of awareness that covers knowledge, skills among their communities to sustain ecotourism. One of the important elements in empowerment is the involvement of the local community in planning and implementing tourism development. Community involvement determines the extent to which the community benefits. Therefore, to ensure that empowerment takes place in the community, readiness, especially from the aspect of human capital and organizational structure, is an important element to ensure the sustainability of CBT development, especially from the economic and cultural aspects, can be realized. Therefore, this study explore the human capital development among Orang Asli Jakun to ensure they ready and able to participate in tourism development at their place.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach, where data is collected through semi structured interviews among key informants. A total of six key informants selected in this study are important individuals involved in the development of tourism among the Orang Jakun community. The main criteria for selection are their knowledge and experiences gained through the process of development. These people include Tok Batin (head of village), cooperative leadership, and community members who are pioneers in offering tourism activities.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The results of interviews conducted among key informants all have the same view that the development of tourism activities by the Jakun indigenous community gives a change to the economic activities they usually do before, including agricultural activities, fishing, and forest-related economic activities, in addition to partly working with national parks. They acknowledge that eco-tourism activities have opened opportunities for alternative economic activities for the local community. This is because Endau-Rompin National Park, which is close to where they live, is a natural attraction for tourism. Natural treasures consisting of flora and fauna are the main attraction to this area, in addition to the unique culture of the Jakun indigenous people. However, on average, the respondents admitted that the COVIC pandemic that hit the country and Malaysia in particular in 2020 with the Movement Control Ordinance really had an impact on those involved in tourism activities, especially tour guides and other tour operators. Motivation, especially among licensed tour guides who are among the youth, is greatly affected by this pandemic. Even though the respondents to the study are aware that the COVID pandemic that has hit has affected not only tourism activities but all sectors across the world.

The study revealed that the respondents agreed that training is an important element in ensuring the ability of the local people to understand, develop, manage, and run tourism activities in a proper manner. The awareness-building programs need to be carried out continuously for not only those involved in the development and operation of tourism but also for the communities living in the area to ensure they have a positive perception and actively participate in the tourism activities. The findings of the study disclosed that the community had successfully established Koperasi Jakun Asli Peta Mersing Berhad (cooperative organization) in 2017 with a total membership of 65 people. The vision of the cooperative is to advance the eco-tourism development of Kampung Peta (Peta Village) to an international level. Thus, leadership knowledge and exposure among the Koperasi Jakun Asli Peta Mersing Berhad leaders and management team members are crucial and need to be addressed. Among the training courses needed by this group are leadership, strategic planning, proposal development, business knowledge, basic knowledge on the financial and accounting aspects, marketing, digital knowledge, website development, and administrative, product, and package development, communication and negotiation skills. Most of the respondents have the same view that cooperative need a mentor to provide guidance and facilitate them at an early stage. Though all the respondents agreed that the community successfully established the business-owned community entity, they still face challenges in attracting more membership among community members. Arief, et al. (2010) highlighted the important of awareness program to increase the participation of local community in tourism development.

".. Indeed, training is important, otherwise, we don't really understand why we want to do tourism, even though we are familiar with forests and nature. Awareness about the importance of tourism activities needs to be revealed to the community. We already have awareness, but others also need to be built... so that they understand and can join together".

"..courses that are important to us include leadership, knowledge to manage cooperatives, planning, proposal preparation, business, wanting to make sales, packages, communication, negotiation, and others".

"..we have successfully established a tourism cooperative... so all tourism activities can be placed under the cooperative..., we still need to learn how to operate a cooperative.. leadership skills and exposure very important for them and cooperative should has a mentor to guide at the beginning before they can run by themselves"

The establishment of business entities such as cooperatives is one of the critical factors in the success of community based tourism development. Since tourism activities are a form of business, they need to be managed by a business entity (Amran, 2010). With respect to the concept of CBT, the establishment of a community-owned business entity looks like a catalyst to empower the local people in the planning and development of tourism activities. As Goodwin and Santili (2008) highlighted, the local community will get more benefits once they develop, manage, and own the tourism business activities. A study conducted at Miso Walai Homestay Sabah, which is recognized as one of the best community tourism projects in the world, proved that the involvement of community members in the planning and development of tourism through the Tourism Cooperative is a key success factor (Hamzah & Khalifah, 2010). As a result, the communities involved have a high sense of ownership and belonging over tourism development, which reduces the issue of economic leakage to outside parties.

The findings of the study showed that training provided by government agencies should be focus-based and customized. Top-down courses are seen as less suitable among the indigenous community, instead providing courses based on needs and levels of competencies. Generally, respondents admitted that there are courses provided by government agencies involved, but some of the courses are one-off and not based on levels, for instance, beginning, intermediate, and advanced. The community members were also interested in joint courses that can build knowledge and skills for generating economic opportunities that are not only directly related to tourism activities but also agriculture and farming, including honey bee farming courses, village chicken farming, and others. The respondents also commented on the training approach, which still employs a classroom style rather than a hands-on, fieldwork, or experiential learning approach such as visits, etc.

5. CONCLUSION

The development of eco tourism in Endau Rompin National Park opens up new economic opportunities for the Jakun Indigenous community. The community's position close to the second largest national park in the Malaysian peninsula, with an estimated land area of approximately 870 square kilometers, acts as a catalyst for the development of eco-tourism among the local community. Through the development of tourism, economic activities that were only based on forests, such as hunting, logging, other forest products, agriculture, and so on, have started to change to economic activities based on tourism. However, the impact of tourism development on the economic development of indigenous communities on a large scale is still a matter of debate. Empowerment among the indigenous community in making decisions, and controlling tourism development is a very important aspect when discussing the concept of sustainability. The development of community capacity through training and guidance is seen as an important factor in building awareness and enabling community members to be actively involved. The form of the course provided must be bottom up, which is according to the needs of community members based on their functions and roles. The government agencies involved in the preparation of the course must conduct a course needs analysis to ensure that the course provided meets the purpose and increases the participation of community members. The hands-on course approach and learning through real experience are seen as suitable for an indigenous community like this. Human capital development is a core component of eco-tourism development among the Jakun Indigenous community to ensure the community receives maximum benefits. The establishment of a cooperative as a business entity to manage and operate tourism activities is a catalyst for the sustainability of tourism development in this area, but the leadership ability of the cooperative also needs attention so that those involved in the management and administration of the cooperative can function well.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) through Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS/1/2020/SS0/UTHM/02/2) VOT K279. In addition, the authors also wish to thank Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), who had given full cooperation to ensure the success of this study

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