Community Based Tourism: Principles and Meaning

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1. Underlying Ideas

Amidst the social changes brought on by globalization, local communities cannot live in isolation. Thai communities and many similar communities around the world have passed the time of absolute self-reliance and are increasingly dependent upon the outside 'urban' world. Interacting with the outside world will not be easy for local communities without sufficient and strong social, cultural, and economic resources.

Unfortunately, across Thailand, the influence of Mass-Consumerism is precipitating the degradation and destruction of natural resources crucial to local communities' livelihoods. Simultaneously, materialism and consumerism are influencing and destabilizing the value systems of established social systems and cultures. Meanwhile, on the national level, a standardized education system and a local administration controlled and directed by the central government are forcing remote, rural communities to become increasingly depend on the state.

Fortunately, there are countervailing social trends in Thailand that open up alternative directions for the future of Thai communities. An increasing number of people are becoming aware of the importance of natural resources conservation and of protecting the environment. The democratization of Thai society is opening ever-greater opportunities for members of the public to use their voice, express their opinions and play a role in the direction of social development. At the same time the importance and profile of the issues of human rights and equal treatment under the law are growing in the public conscience.

These trends are supported by developments in the United Nations and international institutions and by academics and conservationists who understand sustainable development. The understanding of people in urban society that have connection to rural communities is an essential base for designing and implementing successful development strategies. Tourism is one way to bring people of different backgrounds together. Ideally, tourism seems to offer hosts and visitors a unique opportunity to share their different cultures and points-of-view. Members of different societies are able to share first-hand experiences together and to develop personal relationships which can grow into powerful alliance contributing towards the sustainable development of society.
Despite this potential of tourism it is a sad fact that in the 50 years since the worldwide emergence of the tourism industry communities have received few, if any, benefits from tourism. Instead, they have suffered a spectrum of negative impacts that have damaged their natural resources and changed their society and culture in multiple ways. In truth, communities have benefited very little from tourism.

CBT, however, does not seek to address the question: "How can communities benefit more from tourism?". It seeks instead to address a different, developmental question: "How can tourism contribute to the process of community development?".

Community Based Tourism (CBT) is a unique type of tourism with characteristics quite different from mass tourism. Those who intend to put CBT into practice need to fully understand the underlying ideas, principles and components behind CBT.

CBT is not simply a tourism business that aims at maximizing profits for investors. Rather, it is more concerned with the impact of tourism on the community and environmental resources. CBT emerges from a community development strategy, using tourism as a tool to strengthen the ability of rural community organizations that manage tourism resources with the participation of the local people. However, CBT is far from a perfect, prepackaged solution to community problems. Nor is it a miracle cure or a knight in shining armor that will come to save the community. In fact, if carelessly applied, CBT can cause problems and bring disaster.

For this reason, communities that are appropriate for the development of CBT must be chosen carefully and adequately prepared before operating CBT. More importantly, the community should have the strength to modify or suspend CBT, should it grow beyond the management capacity of the community or bring unmanageable negative impacts.
2.1 Principles of CBT

The principles listed below present the concept of CBT, and the way the host community can use tourism as a tool for community development.

CBT should:

1. Recognize, support and promote community ownership of tourism;
2. Involve community members from the start in every aspect;
3. Promote community pride;
4. Improve the quality of life;
5. Ensure environmental sustainability;
6. Preserve the unique character and culture of the local area;
7. Foster cross-cultural learning;
8. Respect cultural differences and human dignity;
9. Distribute benefits fairly among community members;
10. Contribute a fixed percentage of income to community projects;

Before developing CBT in line with these principles, it is necessary to prepare and build the capacity of the host community to manage tourism. CBT marketing should also promote public awareness of the differences between CBT and mass tourism, educating people to realize the importance of CBT as a community tool for resource conservation and cultural preservation. This will attract appropriate tourists for CBT.
Tourism in which the community plays a role goes by a great variety of names: ‘Community Based Tourism’ (CBT), ‘Community Based Ecotourism’ (CBET), ‘Agrotourism’, ‘Eco’ and ‘Adventure Tourism’ and ‘Homestay’ are a few of the prominent terms. Among academics worldwide, there is not yet any consensus on terms for various types of tourism.

In Thailand, the use of these terms is complex, confusing and lacks a standardized terminology. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has established the two dominant definitions of ‘Ecotourism’ and ‘Agrotourism.’ Meanwhile, private tourism businesses across the country have mixed up their own formulas of ‘travel to natural sites’ with ‘adventure tourism’ labeling this mixture ‘Eco’ or ‘Adventure’ Tourism.

For the most part, these labels have been manipulated merely as marketing tools to attract customers rather than describing or representing a cogent set of social or environmental principles.

Many community groups that practice ‘environmentally friendly’ versions of ‘community tourism’ use a Thai term to define their activities which literally translates as “Conservation Tourism.” Broadly speaking, these activities included some form of local, public participation. This is usually translated in English as "Ecotourism". CBT developed from these forms of tourism to become Community-Based Sustainable Tourism (CBST). In Thailand, the Responsible Ecological Social Tours Project or REST pioneered community-based tourism under the name "Community Based Tourism-CBT"
In recent years, Ecotourism has become popular worldwide. Meanwhile, the principle of active community participation in tourism has gained wider acceptance. The United Nations declared 2002 the "International Year of Ecotourism". This fortunate and opportune rise in the international profile of Ecotourism nevertheless gave rise to yet another new term: Community Based Ecotourism (CBET)!

Seeking an absolute 'Final Consensus' on all the terms and definitions of the many diverse types of Ecotourism is difficult and probably not worth the effort. Our time and energy are really better spent focusing on the objectives of tourism. The present handbook focuses solely on CBT. Nevertheless, other types of tourism are presented here briefly, for comparison purposes only, in order to help the reader to more clearly understand the unique concepts of CBT.

2.3 The Definition of Community Based Tourism (CBT)

"CBT is tourism that takes environmental, social, and cultural sustainability into account. It is managed and owned by the community, for the community, with the purpose of enabling visitors to increase their awareness and learn about the community and local ways of life".

(REST, 1997).
The following are the key elements of CBT:

**Natural and Cultural Resources**
- Natural resources are well preserved
- Local economy and modes of production depend on the sustainable use of natural resources
- Customs and culture are unique to the destination

**Community Organizations**
- The Community shares consciousness, norms and ideology
- The Community has elders who hold local traditional knowledge and wisdom.
- The Community has a sense of ownership and wants to participate in its own development

**Management**
- The Community has rules and regulations for environmental, cultural, and tourism management.
- A local organization or mechanism exists to manage tourism with the ability to link tourism and community development.
- Benefits are fairly distributed to all.
- A percentage of profits from tourism is contributed to a community fund for economic and social development of the community.

**Learning**
Tourism activities and services aim at:
- Fostering a shared learning process between hosts and guests.
- Educating and building understanding of diverse cultures and ways of life.
- Raising awareness of natural and cultural conservation among tourists and the local community.
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3. Terms and Definitions for Types of Tourism Similar to CBT

3.1 Ecotourism

'Ecotourism' is 'Responsible Travel' in areas containing natural resources that possess endemic characteristics and cultural or historical resources that are integrated into the area's ecological system. Its purpose is to create an awareness among all concerned parties of the need for and the measures used to conserve ecosystems and as such is oriented towards community participation as well as the provision of a joint learning experience in sustainable tourism and environmental management."

(The Tourism Authority of Thailand, 1997).

3.1.1 Elements of Ecotourism

Ecotourism considers the following key elements:

**Site**
- The destination has natural attractions and unique qualities

**Management**
- Tourism is sustainably managed.
- Environmental responsibility is promoted.
- Negative environmental impacts are minimized.

**Process and Activities**
- Visitors are educated about the environment and ecology of the site.
- Environmental awareness is raised among tourists and stakeholders.

**Participation**
- The local community participates in the process.
- Income is distributed fairly to raise the quality of life.
- Profits from tourism contribute to the development of the destination.
### Table 1-1 Ecotourism v. CBT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecotourism</th>
<th>CBT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Objective:</strong> Responsible management of natural attractions, local culture and the unique qualities of the destination.</td>
<td>Responsible management of the environment, natural resources, social system and culture in response to the needs of the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Ownership</strong> Unspecified</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Tourism Management</strong> Unspecified</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Tourism Linkages</strong> Emphasizes tourism and the environment</td>
<td>Emphasizes holistic development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***The clearest difference between CBT and Ecotourism is the issue of ownership.***
3.2 Short Visits

Mass tour programs have featured short visits of a few hours to local communities for quite some time. A typical visit is a couple of hours in an ‘exotic’ hill tribe village in Northern Thailand or a brief look around in a community of semi-nomadic fisherfolk in the South. Another example of a short visit is “agrotourism” that emerged after the crisis of Thai economy in 1997. The government promoted short visits that would take tourists to successful and unique farms, for tourists to sample and buy farm produce. Some agrotourism destinations later became a part of the “One Tambon (sub-district) One Product” scheme. Within this situation, short visits are often simply ‘arts and crafts’ shopping trips that some incorrectly label as “CBT.”

Table 1-2 CBT v. Short Visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CBT</th>
<th>Short Visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Duration of visit</td>
<td>Adequate time for understanding, through observation, activities, and discussion.</td>
<td>Short time for observation; Little or no time for visitors to participate in local activities. Little or no exchange with the local people to increase cross-cultural understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Participation in Community Activities</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learning and Cultural Exchange</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pricing &amp; Income</td>
<td>Set by the community</td>
<td>The community has little control except in the case of tours that come for the purpose of purchasing local products from the “One Tambon One Product” scheme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tourist Understanding of the Community</td>
<td>Possible through meaningful observation, conversation and interaction with the community members as the result of the program design.</td>
<td>Only possible through an outside resource person who has knowledge of the local community and acts as an ‘expert’ intermediary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Homestay

Homestay is one type of tourism that promotes interaction between host families and tourists. One of the many accommodation options available to CBT, homestays are able to act as a development tool to raise awareness of cleanliness and hygiene issues within the destination community. The somewhat ‘rough and ready’ prospect of a homestay also helps to ensure that tourists who visit the community are appropriate for CBT. Organizing a homestay requires minimal investment besides a mattress a pillow, and a mosquito net: items that most rural village homes already have set aside for close friends and family members that come to visit.
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Table 1-3 CBT v. Homestay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CBT</th>
<th>Homestay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Definition</td>
<td>Learning comes mostly from the host family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning comes from the whole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Accommodation</td>
<td>Accommodation in the home of a host family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many types can be arranged including</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tents, cabins, homestays or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guesthouses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learning Process</td>
<td>Depends on the enthusiasm of both visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible through interaction with many</td>
<td>and the host family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>types of people including host families,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local guides and groups that organize</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities in the community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Community Benefits</td>
<td>Often only wealthier households have a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community members of different status</td>
<td>chance to provide accommodation and will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can benefit by taking various roles in</td>
<td>collect benefits for themselves, except in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tourism management such as resource</td>
<td>case that there are rules ensuring part of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persons, guides, hosts. Part of the</td>
<td>profits are contributed to community projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>profits is contributed to community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>projects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Homestay is a delicate social and cultural issue for the community. It requires a change of perspective from generously offering accommodation to unexpected guests or relatives to suddenly requesting a fee for services. Social and cultural relationships, and cultures of hospitality, can become degraded and economically oriented. For this reason it is necessary to weigh the pros and cons before developing a homestay as an accommodation option.

The community can develop and provide homestay accommodation for a fixed price if they set clear objectives and wholeheartedly follow them. A homestay should not focus merely on providing accommodation for profit while ignoring cultural exchange and respect for the host’s culture. Generosity and hospitality should be emphasized above providing “5-stars” service. To do otherwise would devalue the host at the expense of the guest.
4. CBT and Community Development

CBT is intended as a tool for community development and environmental conservation. For this reason, you should apply a “holistic” view, (i.e., one that encompasses a complete range of social, cultural, economic, environmental and political development factors), to your analysis of the community context. Understanding the community situation will help you maximize the capacity of CBT to act as an effective and sustainable community development strategy.

Figure 1.1 Five Principle Aspects of Community Development

4.1 Holistic Community Development

Rural communities in Thailand have faced many changes since the Thai central government began implementing social and economic development plans in 1961, directing the country towards export oriented production. The impacts of globalized trade and investment on local community development since that time deserve concern and contemplation.

Before setting tourism objectives, you should consider the conditions of the relationship between the community and its:

- natural resources (e.g., rights, conflicts);
- cultural heritage (e.g., continuity);
- modernization (e.g., quality of life, consumerism);
- economic development (e.g., employment and income stability);
- rights to self-governance (e.g., role of local government, degree of local participation)
CBT and community development are inherently connected, because they share the same natural and cultural resource. Culture and social norms determine not only resource use but also structure internal and external relationships. Ideally, the value of fostering the relationship between Local Cultural Wisdom and Local Environmental Resources should be internalized by the community members and integrated into all aspects of CBT management.

Figure 1.2 shows how CBT can be used as a tool for community development:

- **Economic**
  - Raise funds for community development
  - Create jobs in tourism
  - Raise the income of local people

- **Political**
  - Enable the participation of local people
  - Increase the power of the community over the outside
  - Ensure rights in natural resource management

- **Social**
  - Encourage respect for different cultures
  - Foster cultural exchange
  - Embed development in local culture

- **Environmental**
  - Study the carrying capacity of the area
  - Manage waste disposal
  - Raise awareness of the need for conservation

Tourism can be a powerful tool for community development, especially if you view tourism and community development as necessarily connected. The following table suggests the ways that the principles of sustainable development can be put into practice to make tourism sustainable.
Table 1-4 Tourism v. Holistic Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Sustainable Development</th>
<th>Sustainable Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>• Income from local production</td>
<td>• Raise funds for community development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Diversified local economy</td>
<td>• Create jobs in tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Self-reliance</td>
<td>• Raise the income of local people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>• People-centered development</td>
<td>• Raise the quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Social justice</td>
<td>• Promote community pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Satisfying quality of life</td>
<td>• Divide roles fairly between women/men, elder/youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Active community organizations</td>
<td>• Build community management organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>• Formal and informal education</td>
<td>• Encourage respect for different cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Local culture passed on to the next generation</td>
<td>• Foster cultural exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cultural preservation</td>
<td>• Embed development in local culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>• Natural resources management rights</td>
<td>• Study the carrying capacity of the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Environmental responsibility</td>
<td>• Manage waste disposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Natural resources conservation</td>
<td>• Raise awareness of the need for conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>• Community participation</td>
<td>• Enable the participation of local people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Development in response to community needs</td>
<td>• Increase the power of the community over the outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Democratization</td>
<td>• Ensure rights in natural resources management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In preparing the community for CBT, you should consider the establishment of a Contract or Commitment among the stakeholders. This can be done through the process of settling on mutual goals and participating in the ten steps below. Steps 1 and 2 are particularly important before determining to begin CBT. Step 9 is a way to evaluate the readiness of the community to manage tourism.

Although it is important to build the confidence of the community, we did not include this as a specific step. The facilitating organization should rather integrate ‘community confidence building’ throughout the developmental process. Measuring Community Confidence is also an informal way for the facilitating organization to evaluate community capacity to manage CBT.

The steps of building community capacity to manage tourism is as follows. Detail is presented in chapters 2 to 12.

1. Choose a destination.
2. Complete a feasibility study in cooperation with the community
3. Set vision and objectives with the community
4. Develop a plan to prepare the community to manage tourism
5. Set direction for organizational management
6. Design tour programs
7. Train interpretive guides
8. Develop a marketing plan
9. Launch a pilot tour program
10. Monitor and evaluate the process