

**The Analysis of Ecotourism as Dynamics in Common Property Management:
A Case Study of Plai Phong Pang Thai-Style House Conservation Club, Tambon
Plai Phong Pang, Amphoe Amphawa, Samutsongkhram Province**

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the patterns of management of common property and tourism by Plai Phong Pang's Thai-style house conservation club. The analysis applies the conceptual framework of dynamic common property management (Oakerson, 1992) and the eco-tourism principle (Gail Nash, 1997, referred in Yos Santasombatr and others, 2004) to explain change and tourism resource management patterns as a community based common property. This research applies qualitative research methods by conducting a descriptive analysis according to Oakerson (1992). The factors under study are resource patterns, utilization rules of each resource, internal and external factors affecting the decision-making structure, relationship patterns among community members, and the results of common property management. Finally, the researcher expects to see a changing pattern and adaptation in common property management in the Plai Phong Pang community. The researcher collected data through the methods of non-participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. This study found that there are three changing phases of tourism resource management as a community common property; during the 1st phase (1999 - 2002) tourism activity had been introduced to the community but was not highly prevalent at that moment. During the 2nd Phase (2002 -2006) tourism in the area was very high. There were a higher number of tourists and those who utilized common properties during this period. And for the final phase, the 3rd phase (2006 until now), more investors in resort building came to Plai Phong Pang and the nearby sub-districts in Amphawa. The analysis according to the four factors of Oakerson (1992) found that (1) tourism resources were open for free utilization and the rate of utilization seems to be higher. (2) the rule of common property utilization in the district is not clearly functioning through negotiation and the community information process. Additionally, the rule of the marine transportation department is also functioning to control the environmental impacts from motor boats. (3) Sub-district members are living together in agricultural society. All of them are living as kin. However the individual living style is starting to gain more influence in the area. (4) When the results of tourism resource management as a common property in Plain Phong Pang sub-district was compared with the principle of eco-tourism according to Gail Nash (1997), it was found that recently the tourism management of the local conservation club has shifted away from eco-tourism concept due to a lack of awareness and avoidance of the following factors: environmental impacts, saving funds for preservation, distribution of benefits among community members and the nearby communities, and a proper management according to the natural surroundings based on sustainable resource management.

Key words: common property management / eco-tourism / Plai Phong Pang

1. Introduction

Tourism is the highest growth industry in Thailand. It was found that in 2007, there were approximately 14.6 million foreign visitors to the country, which bring the revenue of approximately 547,781.81 million Baht from the tourism industry. However domestic the revenue from Thai tourists also play important role for local economy especially during the economic crisis (Chanan Wongvipak and others, 2004). The higher the number of tourists, the higher the rate of resource utilization rises. Since natural resources are used as development capital for the tourism industry, the increase of environmental impacts can hardly be avoided. The Tourism Authority of Thailand is also trying to overcome this gap through the presentation of a new tourism pattern which reduces the impact to the environment as much as possible. This tourism pattern emphasizes education and responsibility towards local traditions together with the promotion of tourism, as well as providing benefits to the local people. This pattern is well known as “eco-tourism,” and aims to support a process of learning for tourists to have a better understanding of nature as well as local cultures. Eco-tourism aims to provide economic, social and environmental benefits to the local community as much as possible. Eco-tourism promotes these factors ahead of economic interests, as opposed to other patterns of tourism which emphasize the provision of facilities for tourism and tourism operators in order to gain the highest benefit without concern over the loss or benefit for local communities and natural resources.

Plai Phong Pang sub-district, Amphawa district is one community which has been influenced by the promotion of eco-tourism in Thailand since 1998 A.D. The Plai Phong Pang Thai-style House Conservation Club

under the support from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Community Development Department, Ministry of Interior. Mr. Thavat Boonpat – was the chairman of the Plai Phong Pang sub-district at that time. The club started to increase the selling points of the area by using the Thai-style houses as a symbol. The management pattern and administration committee at this time was functioning informally. The obvious rule was that only qualified traditional houses with the proper utilities for visitors would be accepted to join the project. At the beginning, there were only three houses ready to join. The Social Investment Fund (SIF) gave supported by providing funds to build a guest house, then, project received a warm welcome from visitors. Additionally, it also received a great honor by receiving a tourism award for Urban and Rural Tourism in 2000 A.D. This award is bestowed for effective management of the environment and tourism of the project.

The tourism management of this group was the first to present the beauty of local resources and community lifestyle for tourism. Hence, this research aims to apply the conceptual framework of common property management to describe the management of tourism in this area in order to analyze the factors and patterns of tourism resource management as a common property. Finally, this research intends to enhance understanding of the adjustment dynamic of the community on common property management and analyze the results of the management according to the principle of Eco-tourism.

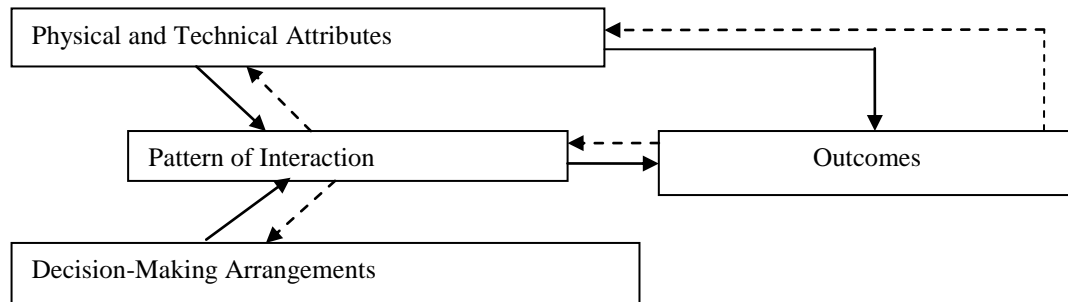
2. Methodology

The research on the analysis of ecotourism as dynamics in common property management applies qualitative research methods. The methods of non-participant observation, in-depth

interviews, and focus group discussions were conducted to collect data according to the conceptual framework of Oakerson (1992) and Gail Nash (1997).

2.1 Data analysis

1. Analyze the relations among relevant factors according to the paradigm of Oakerson (1992) in terms of community adaptation.



2. Analyze the results of ecotourism management through comparison with the seven principles of ecotourism introduced by Gail Nash (1997).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 The analyzed results of tourism resource management in terms of the dynamics on common property management.

3.1.1 During 1999 – 2002

1) Physical and Technical Attributes

The natural resources in Plai Phong Pang sub-district were abundant. There were only low levels of accessibility for tourism were found. Villagers were not aware that organizing tourist activities which present the local lifestyle would draw tourists' attention and increase income for the community. The number of tourists during this time was such that it was still conducive to preserving the abundance of natural resources and the local lifestyle. Community members relied their resources without any conflict. The main resource water that all villagers had the freedom to access water. In this beginning phase of the organization of tourism, the club tried to present the authentic local lifestyle. Concern over common property was not the main

purpose since community resources were not obviously permeated by the promotion of tourism. Hence, villagers did not concern about the accessibility of resources in the Plai Phong Pang sub-district area.

2) Decision-Making Arrangements

The pattern of tourism management was led by a club under the leadership of Mr. Thavat – a chairman of the Plai Phong Pang sub-district administration organization – which was formed informally. The only regulation in existence was regarding the basic qualifications to join the project. Only Thai-style Houses with clean utilities capable to welcome visitors were allowed to run tourism activities. Earlier, the administrative movement belonged to the Sub-district Administration Organization, but in 2000 A.D. after changing the administration team without any tourism promotion policy, the administrative power was handed over to the club chairman at that time – Mr. Thavat Boonpat. Consequently tourists were distributed among three project members equally. The club functioned without any setting of a steering committee or a division of labour. In terms of resource accessibility, there was no formal agreement or rule among community

members of this sub-district. Villagers in Plai Phong Pang and the nearby sub-districts had the freedom to utilize common property.

3) Pattern of Interaction

The relationships of the villagers in Plai Phong Pang sub-district based on the agricultural society and natural resources sharing. The main common resource in this area is water. Villagers could access water without any conflict. All negotiations and organization of any activities were conducted simply. The number of traditional houses joining the project was still few. Hence, problems the impact on the way of life of the local people and their relations not significant.

4) Outcomes

Tourism management during this period were very active according to the ecotourism principles of Gail Nash (1997). The number of tourists visiting this area was still less, so tourism management during this time was not disturbing local lifestyle among community members. The main occupations in this area were still based on agriculture and reliant on the abundance of existing natural resources. Tourism management was trying to present the local livelihood according to natural and cultural conditions inherited from one generation to the next. As a result, the promotion of tourism could bring extra income to the area. The tourism pattern during this time was trying to present the actual local lifestyle of Plai Phong Pang community members which based on the abundant natural resources of the area.

3.1.2 During 2002-2006

1) Physical and Technical Attributes

Tourism in Plai Phong Pang was very popular among visitors. Streams were still the main common property in community and used to travel from place

to place in Amphawa district, and row boats were an important mode of transportation. The increasing number of tourism boats disturbed the carrying capacity of the area. This influenced natural resource since it was considered as a common property of the Plai Phong Pang sub-district and there was no restriction on the carrying capacity. To control the accessibility of visitors was not practical since villagers were get to a traditional way of thinking towards the open accessibility of common resources. The number of traditional houses joining the project were increasing to 25 houses as well as the increasing number of boat as a result, the riverbank conditions declined due to strong waves from motor boats. Villagers started complaining about the loud sounds made by the motor boats. Villagers became more concerned with taking care of common natural resources, cleaning the rivers, and rearranging the trees alongside the riverbank. They all agreed that a pleasant and clean environment could attract more attention from tourists. However, the management of natural resources was still functioning informally since it was reliant on good public consciousness only, not any other systematic practice.

2) Decision-Making Arrangements

The more attention from tourists to Plai Pong Pang Thai-style houses rose, the more income it brought into the community. Accordingly, the tourism promotion club was able to convince more villagers in Plai Phong Pang to join in tourism activities. There were not enough Thai-style houses to accommodate visitors, so the club recruited more qualified houses. At that time 25 houses applied for membership. Since the project started with informal management, the regulation to recruit membership was also flexible. Consequently, not only Thai-style houses were recruited to the project with the

purpose to welcome the increasing number of tourists. However, the overall tourism activities in the area were still based on the presentation of local natural resources, as well as local culture and way of life.

3) Pattern of Interaction

The growth of visitors influenced the increasing number of boats and noise is pollution. Villagers lost miracy during the night when visitor going see the fire-flies nearby their houses. Some of the villagers were complaining about the dogs barking. Those villagers who did not join the project complained since they were suffering from the dog barking without any benefit from the project. Some of them even cut down the Lamphu trees where fire-flies stayed on. This situation caused conflict among community members. Mr. Thavat Boonat tried to negotiate with those who got impact from the project by giving certain compensation. These actions showed a good spirit and care for the affected people, although it might be considered as a small reward.

4) Outcomes

The tourism pattern of the district was in at a moderate level based on the ecotourism principle of Gail Nash (1997). Due to the increasing number of tourists, the club accepted more houses to join the project. As a result more villagers had increasing income at the same time. However, the growth of tourism brought some changes to the area and affected the daily life of the villagers. The natural structure of the riverbank was changed to concrete material in order to handle the strong waves from the motor is boats.

3.1.3 2006 to Present

1) Physical and Technical Attributes

Tourism in Plai Phong Pang widely attracts more attention from tourists. Villagers who join the home stay project can gain more income continuously. The growth of tourism in the area attract more investors to build guesthouses and resorts. This situation give an impact of increasing price the land price. Consequently, more orchards were changed into accommodate to welcome more tourists. Large numbers of the trees nearby the stream were cut to build the concrete riverbank to protect the erosion effect from to the motored boats. During this period, the common resources of Plai Phong Pang was invaded widely in terms of visits to natural sites, changing the natural surroundings to construct buildings, and increasing numbers of tourist boats in the area.

2) Decision-Making Arrangements

The increasing number of resorts effected the tourism activities of the club since it decreased interest from tourists of Thai-style houses. The club suspended to give the compensation to affected villagers due to the decreased revenue from tourism. Since there are also other investors running tourism businesses in the area, the club considered it unfair to carry to this alone.

Due to the increased number of tourism boats in 2006; the 3rd River Transportation Section enforced a rule to control the boats in Amphawa district. The rule requires that every boat has to be registered has to have and the rowing certificate. Also, boats are prohibited to make noise exceed than 100 decibels. The 3rd River Transportation section together with the Provincial office of Natural Resources of Samusongkram have regularly measure the noise level in the area. This objective is to enforced to control tourism boats in the province.

3) Pattern of Interaction

The interaction among Plai Phong Pang's community members changed due to the interest in sharing of the tourism benefits is increasing. This social integration decline can be obviously seen through the sale of land to outsiders or investors. The positive relations among villagers and the environment, local resources, as well as the traditional way of life are being overwhelmed by business.

4) Outcomes

Based on the ecotourism principle of Gail Nash (1997), a lower trend of

ecotourism was found. During the time period of 2006 to present, there are many changes due to the increasing of resort accommodation. This has changed the natural environment of the area and it more buildings. The natural resources are effected and this influenced the reducing number of fire-flies. Consequently, the income of the Plai Phong Pang conservation club was reduced.

3.2 The study results of ecotourism pattern based on the principles of Gail Nash (1997)

Table 1 Analysis of ecotourism management according to the principle of Gail Nash

Conceptual	During 1999 – 2002	During 2002-2006	2006 to Present
Principle 1 Eco-tourism must avoid creating any negative impacts or destroying the natural and cultural environment at any tourism site.	✓	-	-
Principle 2 Eco-tourism must educate tourists in order to build public consciousness on natural and cultural preservation.	✓	✓	✓
Principle 3 Income gained from eco-tourism must contribute to the preservation of the natural environment and the management of preservation zones.	-	-	-
Principle 4 The local community and nearby communities must directly gain benefit from eco-tourism.	-	✓	-
Principle 5 Eco-tourism must emphasize the planning and growth of sustainable tourism. It must the guarantee that the number of tourists will not exceed the carrying capacity of the local ecology.	✓	-	-
Principle 6 Most of the income gained from eco-tourism must be given to the owner of tourism sites. Consequently, eco-tourism emphasizes the utilization local products and services.	✓	✓	✓
Principle 7 Eco-tourism must consider the use of infra-structure which is developed based on the idea of sustainable resource management, saving fuel energy, the preservation of local plants, and the management of tourism in harmony with the natural environment.	✓	-	-

4. Conclusion

The way of life of the villagers in Plai Phong Pang sub-district is closely related to the river and water is the main resource of the area. The unique characteristics of this area are the fire-flies, the natural surroundings, and the local lifestyle and traditions. The abundance of the natural environment creates a lot of employment in the area, for instance shrimp trapping, coconut farming, coconut palm sugar making and so on. These agricultural activities bring food security to the village. The government is aware of the significance of the tourism campaign. Accordingly, the department of community development in each province has been assigned to implement tourism promotion projects. However this campaign also brings a negative impact to community since certain natural resources, were exploited to serve the tourism business. Also the local lifestyle and ecology have been disturbed. The increasing numbers of tourist boats affect the riverbanks, creating landerosion so villagers need to build a concrete embankment. The agricultural areas reduced and allow the construction of resorts and guesthouses. The natural habitat for fire-flies has been effected. Factors such as the informal management of common property as well as an invasion by development for tourism are negatively affecting the tourism businesses run by the Thai-style house conservation club. Tourists have more choices. Those mentioned situations may lead to the degradation of a self-reliant economic system and resource based in the community. The market - based economic system should be more concerned since it can disturb the resource base.

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