

A Model of Sustainable Tourism Management to Strengthen the Communities in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand

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This is an observation and participative action research of the Shan ethnic community-based tourism of the Pambok, Tham Lod, and Naplajad villages within the Mae Hong Son Province of Thailand. The communities still lack skills in community-based tourism to meet international tourism standards. A survey, in-depth interviews, and a panel discussion of 60 stakeholders were collectively used to collect data. This research aims to analyse the problems that obstruct the management of community-based tourism, develop communities' potential to strengthen community-based tourism, and integrate a community-based tourism network to create sustainability. The results showed that the problem conditions of the three communities include the internal environment, external environment, and external environmental operations. There are also issues and obstacles in managing the community-based tourism effectively. However, all three communities firmly maintain their Shan identity in the aspects of the ways of life, their beliefs, and cultures. This may include a worshipping guardian spirit ceremony, Shan ordination, and Shan attire, as well as tourism resources such as Kho-Gu-Soh Bamboo Merit Bridge, Lod Cave, and the organic farm-stay tourism of Na Plajaad. The stakeholders from government, private, and civil society sections within the community-based tourism of the three studied areas are integrated in order to create an effective and standard community-based tourism network. This was executed through a social media fanpage, community-based tourism map, travel itinerary, community-based tourism manual, and community-based tourism network committee. Subsequently, this creates a model for community-based

tourism villages, in order to establish the Mae Hong Son provincial strategy.

Keywords: *Sustainable tourism management, Community-based tourism, Shan ethnic groups.*

Introduction

The situation of international tourism in 2018 showed that the number of tourists around the world was more than 1.403 million people, which grew by 5.6 per cent from 2017. In the Asia Pacific region, it grew by 6.5 per cent (UNWTO, 2019). In a global standing, Thailand has the ninth highest number of tourists and has the fourth highest income from tourism. Tourism today focusses on the true conditions of tourist attractions within a community, society, and country, where tourists can personally experience lifestyles, ethnic history and participate in activities, as well as in various products, and services. To do so, is to create pride, the need to maintain various tourist attractions, and to absorb and perceive the true way of life of people in each locality. This makes tourism sustainable and naturally stable, and not a novelty for tourists to admire for only a short time. Sustainable tourism refers to protecting the resources of complex tourist attractions for sustainable use in the future, and for the benefit of today's society (WTO, 1998). The tourism that tourists must now consider, is to protect and improve tourism resources in the future by managing the overall resource to cover the economy, society, and maintain the natural beauty in accordance with the local culture, important ecosystem, biodiversity, and the way of life of all beings (WTTC, 1995).

At present, Thai and foreign tourists, who have different tourism behaviours, have turned their attention to the same point, which is the alternative tourism market, consisting of green tourism, cultural tourism, and special interest tourism (Goeldner & Ritchies, 2006; Fongtanakit, Somjai, Prasitdumrong, & Jermisittiparsert, 2019; Jermisittiparsert & Chankoson, 2019; Jermisittiparsert, Joemsittiprasert, & Phonwattana, 2019). Today, the world is becoming easier, in the trend of digital technology. For example, convenient transportation creates faster mobility, which enables business travellers and tourists who seek new experiences and perspectives. It is easy to learn and communicate across cultures. It is a great opportunity for people all over the world to participate through various activities, especially through cultural diversity tourism activities. In 2018, Thailand's main income was driven from tourism. The Government has encouraged tourists to visit various tourist attractions, in an effort to increase income for the community, and the nation through tourism in various dimensions, such as ecotourism, health tourism, and cultural tourism. In 2018, more than 38 million foreign tourists visited Thailand, contributing over two trillion baht in revenue (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, https://www.mots.go.th/old/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=11935, accessed on 30 August 2019).

At present, the Government has promoted community-based tourism management by focussing on visitors experiencing people's way of life within the community through history, ethnicity, perspective, and faith. It is a potential tourism because it is a community-based tourism that supports the conservation of natural resources and the environment and generates revenue for the local community economy. In marketing, this type of tourism is also a niche market. The three important factors that have caused a trend to change the tourism pattern in the world tourism industry from conventional tourism to the development of alternative tourism, includes the demand for environmental and natural resources conservation, educational tourism, and human development (Kamol Rattanawirakul, 2006). Tourists want to live in a new and exotic way of life or live in accordance with the atmosphere and simple local conditions, in order to change a busy urban lifestyle into one of simplicity and peace. (Suwanee Santhanawanich, 2005).

The Mae Hong Son Province is a border province adjacent to Myanmar and is located on a steep mountain with abundant natural conditions. There are more than eight ethnic groups living together in peace and who earn their living by farming and finding forest products. The Government and provincial government agencies promote Mae Hong Son as a province of ecotourism and cultural tourism. They focus on the community to maintain the identity forms that are ideas, beliefs, cultures, traditions, the way of life of various ethnic groups, and preserving the original environment of nature to live sustainably through the folkways of civil society (Mae Hong Son Provincial Office, 2018). There are two tourist routes which are divided into the Mae Hong Son Province. The northern route includes the Muang, Pang Mapha, and Pai districts. The southern route includes the Mae Sariang, Sob-Moei, Mae Lanoi, and Khun Yuam districts. The researchers chose to study the northern route.

Within the community, the researchers focus on the tourism management and the potential development of the people to align with the 20-year policy and national research and innovation strategy for 2017–2037 (Kitiphong Phromwong, 2017). This study is in accordance with the four-year provincial strategy of Mae Hong Son (2015–2018), in the first objective, which is to promote and develop the quality of tourism in the aspects of ecosystem, ways of life, and health. The activities of this strategy include: (i) promoting the province to be “the vacation city of the middle and high income tourists”; (ii) restoring, preserving, and promoting the cultural tourism and ways of life; (iii) developing quality tourist attractions and tourism activities, and encourage all-year travel activities; (iv) developing infrastructure and tourism facilities; (v) developing the potential of tourism personnel; (vi) developing and enhancing OTOP products to create value-added to tourism products; and (vii) promoting public relations and marketing, both at home and abroad, strengthening the community, solving the root of the problem, adding value to local wisdom, and creating income and careers within the community (Mae Hong Son Provincial Office, 2018).

The major problems of community tourism concern tourism management; creating tourism networks between communities; community readiness; the continuous lack of participation of the Government, private sectors, and community organisations; and the lack of academic understanding. These issues result in the travel management process being driven slowly and inefficiently, even though the Province is full of natural resources and many beautiful tourist attractions. The further result is a loss of opportunity for tourism competition and lessens the annual income of the community and provinces.

As a result, the research team is interested in exploring and finding sustainable travel management patterns to develop community-based tourism in the Mae Hong Son Province. This study was conducted to analyse the problems that impede community tourism management, community capacity development, and the integration of community networks in tourism management with the participation process of government agencies, the private sector, and the civil society. This includes the analysis of the community potential and the creation of a community-based tourism network comprised of Pambok Village, Pai District; Thamlod Village, Pang Mapha District; and Naplajaad Village, Muang District, in the Mae Hong Son Province. Collectively, this is intended to strengthen the community-based tourism and increase the income of the community to become self-reliant and sustainable.

Literature Review

The researchers reviewed related literature and research within five aspects:

Sustainable Tourism

In all levels of tourism, sustainability is the major concern of the preservation of authentic tourism resources, and the social, and cultural impacts, in order to prolong the lifespan of tourism (Rampaiphan Kaewsuriya, 2006). This includes tourism development that requires cooperation from all stakeholders based on knowledge, understanding, and a love of the tourism resources, and the environment, in order to create sustainable tourism awareness (Boonlert Chittangwattana, 2005). Together these ensure that tourism management does not damage the natural resources, ignore the local culture, look down upon the ethnic people, and maintains respects for tourist attractions. It is especially important that the tourism communities understand the core of participation and carry on sustainable tourism.

Community Management

Tourism communities that want to be successful must understand the concepts of community management in all its dimensions, such as governance, natural resources and the

environment, welfare, safety, sanitation, and public relations, in order to develop the community to achieve systematic sustainability goals. In community-based tourism management, four factors must be considered: human factors, social factors, economic factors, and ecological factors (Sudcheewan Nanthawan Na Ayutthaya, 2008). These four factors are interrelated, including: people have expertise in their assigned tasks, society joins together to share responsibilities, creating income in the community, and maintaining the balance of ecological systems and natural attractions.

Civil Society

Managing the tourism community involves systematically driving activities within the community. There are committees and groups, such as the tourism management committee, welfare committee, homestay committee, community products or community enterprises committee, and so on. Civil society concepts aim to support the social or the public sector, with a stronger and more balanced society known as a supportive society, which must be developed to strengthen the community. This means that a number of people have a common purpose, ideals or beliefs. There is communication within the community or there may be community integration to create generosity within the community (Prawet Wasee, 1998). Therefore, it is necessary to apply a civil society process to strengthen the sustainable community-based tourism.

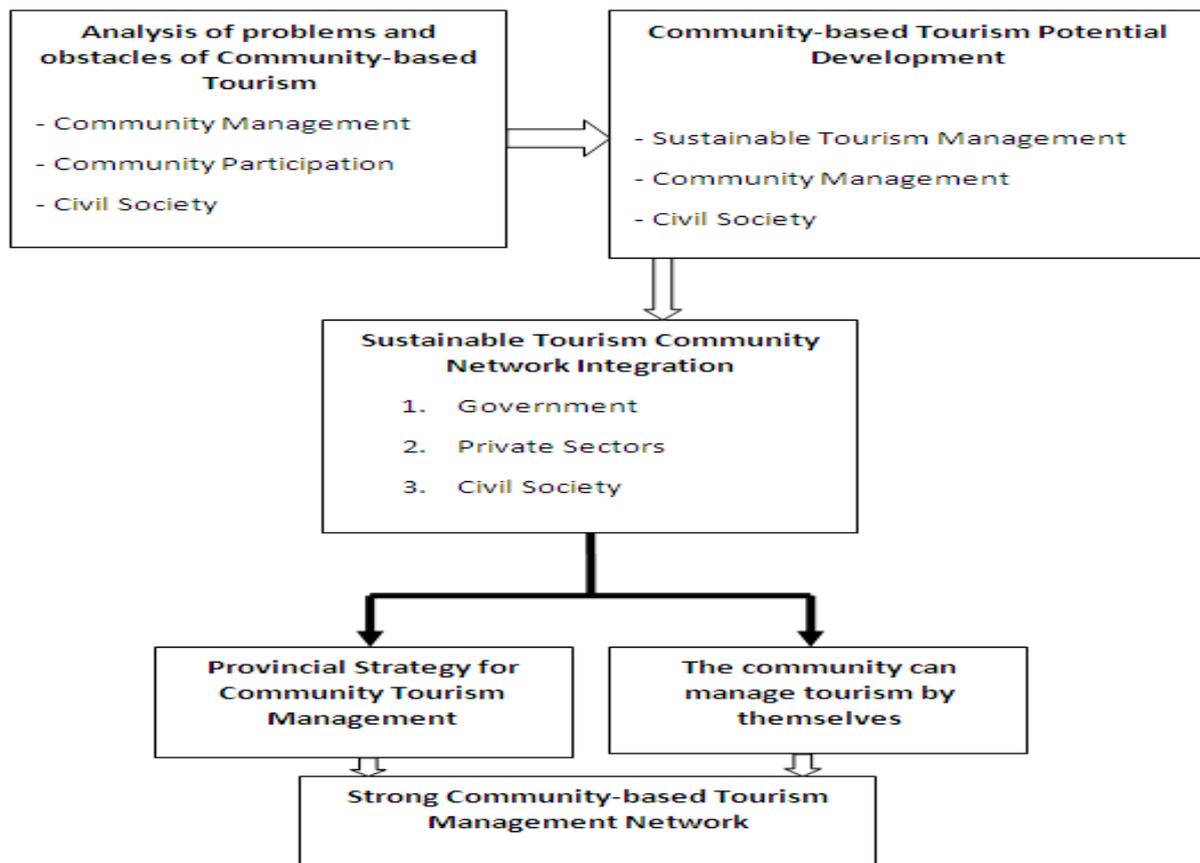
Community Participation

In managing communities that lack participation, the operations or activities can be delayed, which may cause problems, misunderstandings, and lawsuits. Therefore, the management of tourism communities is essential for all members of the community to gain knowledge, understanding, participate in planning, and receive mutual benefits. Participation refers to the psychological and emotional involvement of a person in a group situation. The result of such involvement is the incentive to take action to achieve the objectives of the group, and to feel shared responsibility with the group (Cohen, & Uphoff, 1981). Participation also provides an opportunity for individuals to contribute to each other with the individual's mental and emotional contributions to co-ordinate, co-operate, and take responsibility for matters that have an impact on the management, in order to achieve social objectives. Therefore, in community management, it is necessary to work with community members to ensure their active participation. All members are aware of the positive impact that benefits everyone.

From the synthesis of literature involved in sustainable tourism management, community management, civil society, and community engagement, this leads to the process of managing the tourism community, which would require community engagement management. This concept is related to Dejawit Nilawan's research (2010) on knowledge management to

develop the community business of a Ban Dok-Dang sewing group, in the Doi-Saket District of Chiang Mai, in Thailand. The results revealed problems in four aspects: management, marketing, production, and finance and accounting. There are three aspects of group management development planning: attitude, knowledge, and skills. In this regard, the unity of the three groups, and the strengthening of the development of the group management centre is the pride of the community. Subsequently, it helps the sustainable development of community business and strengthens the network. This research is related to Phusanisa Techathakoeng's (2014) study of the development of local entrepreneurs and community-based tourism in the Thepsadej District of Chiang Mai, in Thailand. The study indicates that the community participates in the management of nature and environmental protection and connects to the development of community enterprises. Thus, local entrepreneurs can compete, and tourists are able to experience the beauty of nature and natural resources, can participate in activities, and purchase local souvenirs.

Conceptual Framework





Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research which focusses on exploratory, and participatory action research.

Population and Samples

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample groups from all of the stakeholders of community-based tourism within government, the private sector, and the civil society. Sixty samples were from Provincial Community Development, Provincial Tourism and Sports, representatives from tourism business, District Community Development, Sub-district Community Development, the Chairman of the Provincial Chamber of Commerce, community leaders, local experts, homestay entrepreneurs, local tourist guides, local representatives, and service personnel. In this regard, the researcher considered the eligibility of the criteria for the sample set in the research design. The samples have the knowledge or experience in the research focus, as well as being voluntary to speak with the research team. The interviewees were chosen specifically because it allows the research team to learn and receive more accurate information than others (Patton, 1990).

Data Collection

Primary Data

The researchers collected data using in-depth interview and focus group discussion, which was developed from relative theory. The data from exploration, interviews, and group discussions were analysed to reveal the potential of the community in managing community-based tourism, tourism network integration, and tourism resources in the communities.

Secondary Data

The research team collected data from research documents, textbooks, research articles, publications, various online media, concepts, and theories related to the research.

Research instrument

Interview

The interview form is used to collect information about tourist attraction resources in the community, community potential in tourism management, and the ability to manage nature conservation by using in-depth interview with the target group, group discussion, and a physical survey of the target area.

The results of the analysis are divided into three parts. The first part is an analysis of the internal environment using eight variables: management, marketing strategy, financial strategy, operational strategy, human resource management strategies, natural environment or integrity of the community, tourist attractions in the community, and tradition or local wisdom. The second part is the external environment. The following variables are used for external factors analysis: economy, technology, law or politics, basic social structure or cultural, and physical. The third part is the external environment operations from the related stakeholders, including government agencies in the area, private organisations or non-governmental organisations in the area, and competitors.

Qualitative data collection is data collection that focusses on conceptualisation and interpretation to gain an understanding of human behaviour and society by using methods of observation, interview, conversation, and note-taking. Advanced statistics will not be used for the analysis. This study is conducted in a natural state that does not provide or control the environment. The researcher will summarise the problem by using all-around visual logic, emphasising the dynamic process. The research method is highly flexible (Arun Raktham & Narong Kulnithed, 2009).

Survey

The researchers used the concept of Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), which includes seven indicators: access, remoteness, facilities, visitor management, naturalness, social encounters, and visitor impact.

Data Analysis

The research team used information from the literature review, information from the interview form, group conversation, and physical survey to transcribe and synthesize information according to the research objectives. Reports and manuals for community action plans were distributed to the general public.

Research Area

This research was conducted in the area of three villages in the Mae Hong Son Province of Thailand: Pambok of Pai District, Thamlod of Pang Mapha District, and Naplajaad of Muang district.

Findings

From the community analysis and stakeholder interviews, the results of the research showed that the problems which obstruct the tourism management by the community are various, as follows. Firstly, in terms of the internal environment, all three communities lack a unified community management, there is no sharing of responsibility, and no systematic participation integration (Seksit Peeratui & Theeradet Naowattana, 2019, interview). Secondly, regarding the marketing strategy, the three communities do not understand the strategies or techniques of approach to modern marketing. They emphasise the management of traditional tourism communities, which are waiting for tourists to enter and travel by themselves. They do not use the media and methods of approaching tourists in a variety of ways. The traditional trading methods are only performed in the surrounding communities (Tharin Kungnakung, Samart Sophama, & Maneerat Mekkatan, 2019, interview). Thirdly, in terms of financial strategy, all three communities have established professional groups, producers and distributors of community products, and a community-based tourism services group. They lack financial strategy training and focus mainly on the support of government agencies. Fourthly, in respect to operational strategy, all three communities lack a community action plan, community business plan, and community tourism promotion plans which can be clearly implemented (Yontachai Sophaworakan, Sombat Petpradub, & Ratreed Kedlok, 2019, interview). Fifth, and lastly, in terms of a human resource management strategy, all three communities have experts or wise men that are knowledgeable in various professions and are well accepted by people in general. However, they still lack the proper management of various aspects of wisdom (Saengchan Muenboontan & Boontan Mekkatan, 2019, interview).

In the dimension of the natural environment and the abundance of the community, all three communities are settled next to the mountains, and abundant forest conditions, with rivers, and streams flowing through. They have plenty of food and ingredients. However, there is a lack of joint maintenance of the natural resources, and the environment (Kasem Saenritcharoen & Pee Juthasatpattarakul, 2019, interview). All three communities have significant tourist attractions, such as the Pambok waterfall, Miang and Thong peak, and the Kho-Gu-Soh bamboo merit bridge of Pambok Village, in the Pai District. In the Tham Lod Village of Pang Mapha District, there is the Lod ancient cave of the primitive age, and the San-Wua-Tor hill of the sea of fog. In the Na Plajaad Village there is a beautiful waterfall, natural trekking trails, and an organic farm-stay activity and plantation, such as garlic, which is a famous product of the Mae Hong Son Province. There are other famous attractions along the way to the three communities. However, there is no working group to maintain these attractions to be beautiful and intact. Most of the attractions are located in the national park, which often creates problems between the responsible government agencies and the communities (Chatree Khamjing & Minh Sukhodom, 2019, interview). On the matter of

tradition and local wisdoms, all three communities are Shan ethnic groups that maintain their significant identity, ways of life, customs, and ceremonies, such as worshipping the village guardian spirit, Shan ordination, wooden castle procession, and so on. However, the local knowledge base has not been gathered in the form of concrete data or learning centres. In the past, there was only inheritance through relatives, rather than teaching the interested youth in general (Suwan Kaenoi, 2019, interview).

Within the external environment, and from the economic aspect, all three communities are agriculture communities with farming, gardening, rice planting, garlic planting, and soybean planting. The main source of income comes from agricultural crops, which is uncertain each year, and is considered a major problem for farmers throughout the country (Phongsakon Kerdkonsab, Sukasem Khamsom, & Mon Wongsawang, 2019, interview). From the technology aspect, the Pambok Village has access to electricity and water, but the Internet and mobile signals are hard to access (Boonananant Lerpho & Atcharee Muenboontan, 2019, interview). Both Thamlod, and Naplajaad villages have access to electricity, water, Internet, and mobile signals. Thus, there is no problem of communication in these two communities (Samran Wararitwutthikul & Supharat Aphinanthipphayakul, 2019, interview). All three communities lack agricultural technology and innovation to help produce products efficiently. In relation to law and governance, all three communities are governed in a democratic system. There is an official community leader. There is an election of the Village Headman, and Assistant Village Headman, in accordance with the central government. There are leaders in various fields, such as women leaders, youth leaders, and so on. There are members of the sub-district administrative organisation in the village. All three communities also have informal leaders, such as elders or sages, whom members respect and obey. As for the law, there are some problems in the case that communities and tourist attractions are located in national parks, which can cause communities and government agencies to misunderstand each other (Narongdet Pothi, 2019, interview). For basic infrastructures, all three communities have good transportation systems, good electrical, water supply, and communication systems that are able to welcome tourists, and visitors (Khankeaw Kanwisetsak & Nuanla-or Nithichayawong, 2019, interview). From the social and cultural aspect, all three communities are ethnic groups which have simple lifestyles, are friendly, peaceful, and publicly minded, who like to go to temples, make merit, and have good cultural traditions, with both spiritual and Buddhism blended together. They are kind and ready to welcome visitors (Samran Wararitwutthikul & Supharat Aphinanthipphayakul, 2019, interview).

As per the external operational environment, such as stakeholders, the results of the research showed that government agencies continuously support the various activities of the three communities, including agriculture, community products, women, and local government. However, they lack integration and coordination in all sectors. Private organisations or non-

governmental organisations in the area participate to drive the community in many aspects, such as tourism, and agriculture. However, they continue to lack continuity, and there is no coordination with the Government for the unity, and efficiency of the community movement.

In the competition, all three communities are considered to have alliances because the production of agricultural products must rely on each other to bargain with the middleman. As for tourism, each community is finding its customers by itself. The research team will create a community-based tourism management network that can transfer tourists among the communities in the Mae Hong Son Province, which results in mutual support and sustainability (Pathomphong Chansawang, 2019, interview).

The research team, with the participation of the communities, has developed community potential in various areas and found that ‘the way of life’ is divided into two components. Firstly, the materials or tools that have been inherited from the past, such as the threshing machine, food preservation containers, and loom, as well as the innovative tools and devices, such as rice mills, water power, and tractors. These tools are made from the wisdom of the community. Secondly, the abstract, which can also be divided into two parts: (i) the system of ideas, beliefs, attitudes, or social values that stay behind human behaviour or a moral value system that holds the minds of people in society, such as the belief of a village’s guardian spirits, making merit, or visiting a temple; and (ii) the lifestyle techniques, whether it is a lifestyle plan, eating habits, dressing, folk play or livelihoods. These are the specific techniques, and identities of the Shan ethnic groups in the three communities (Wandee Wiwitchaikul, Sukira Suwattanamatee, & Kingdao Muenkhadsee, 2019, interview).

In the aspect of beliefs, the study found that all three communities still maintain their identity in beliefs, culture, and traditions, such as paying respect to ancestors, paying respect to the guardian spirit, dress code, language, food, traditions, Shan ordination, auspicious rice offering ceremony, and so on.

Local wisdom is used to transfer knowledge and activities through the system of kinship, community, and group networks that have similar cultural styles by focussing on preserving and inheriting the culture that is unique, in order to make it sustainable (Jamriang Thayanonnanthakul, Wandee Wiwitchaikul, Somdet Nanthawiriyatanont, & Somsak Rasameephorn, 2019, interview).

In respect to the tourist attractions, it was found in all three communities that they are still beautiful and abundant, and consist of ecotourism, cultural, historical, health, and recreation. For example, the cultural tourist sites include the Kho-Gu-Soh bamboo merit bridges of Pambok Village; ecotourism of the Pambok waterfalls, and Lod caves; and agricultural

tourism, such as the organic garlic farm-stay of the Naplajaad Village (Phongsakhorn Kerdkonsap, Sukasem Khamson, & Mon Wongsawang, 2019, interview).

From the analysis of the potential of the people in the area, it was found that the three communities are enthusiastic, and participate in creating, and promoting tourism. The government agencies, and the private sector join to develop the potential of the community to be ready to manage the tourist attractions, and welcome tourists. However, it is lacking integration for efficiency in all sectors and lacking a network for tourism management between the communities.

Picture 1: Group meeting to analyse the potential of the tourism community and demonstrate the community products to promote tourism in all three communities.



The researchers convened a meeting with representatives of the relevant government agencies, and community representatives for the integration, and building of a community-based tourism management network to be efficient with civil society power, which relies on the participation of all parties. A Facebook fanpage, community tourism map, travel itinerary, and community-based tourism manual were created. Five community tourism committees were set up, as follows. Firstly, a community tourism management committee was responsible for managing the tourism community, coordinating policy oversight, and coordinating with government and private agencies, and which can be divided into two sets: the community committee, and the three community network committees. Secondly, the homestay management committee was responsible for accepting reservations, housekeeping, and sharing the guests, in order to be fair to all homestay owners. Thirdly, a welfare committee was responsible for the welfare of food and snacks, including cooking, arranging houses where tourists can have a meal, designing food menus, and so on. Fourthly, the safety

committee was responsible for the safety of visitors in the community. Fifth, and lastly, the local tour guide committee was responsible for organising guides, and the shuttle bus to ensure fairness to all parties. This ensures the management of community-based tourism is efficient and supports strengthening the community sustainably.

Discussion

This research reflects the problematic conditions that impede community tourism management, which are caused by a lack of community management in the internal environment, external environment, and external operations, and that do not have an integrated network. Each sector will carry out their mission, impacting the community to be unable to drive efficiently. This problem can be solved by analysing the community potential to explain the problem in all dimensions, such as lifestyle, belief, and tourist attractions. This is achieved by using three elements of the network, which are the government, private sector, and civil society, to work together to establish a Facebook fanpage, community tourism map, travel itinerary, community-based tourism manual, and community tourism committee.

This has led the three communities to become a model of community-based tourism management, which is recognised by government agencies and tourism sectors in the province. Moreover, the development of a community-based tourism management model has become the strategy of the province. It relates to Phusanisa Techathakerng's study (2014), which found that the community can manage the conservation of natural resources itself, if they are trained, incubated, and supported by the Government, and related sectors continuously. It is also related to the work of Dejawit Nilawan (2010), which revealed that when planning and developing a management model of the group members in the three areas of attitudes, knowledge, and skills, the community is harmonious, understands the community management model, and builds a strong and sustainable network.

Suggestions

1. **Policy Suggestion:** the community-based tourism management model of the Mae Hong Son Province should be proposed for other tourism communities to study, in order to drive the country's tourism strategy in the same direction, and to solve the problems of community-based tourism management, in accordance with the same standards.
2. **Suggestion for Further Study:** there should be research on the ecotourism issues of the ethnic groups in the Mae Hong Son Province, which is aligned with cultural tourism. This is to enable the management of culture, and natural resources in the form of a joint preservation and transmission to youth to raise awareness of preserving and appreciating natural resources, and their local ethnic culture.

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