

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

It can be concluded that the co-operative based cultural tourism management is an option that the Government should use for promoting tourism in the rural areas. It brings about economic, social, and cultural developments as basically expected to see in other forms of tourism management, like community based management. However, the success of the implementation will depend upon several factors, such as the respectfulness of the co-operative, the community readiness, the harmony between the co-operative and the respective community, supply and demand for tourism, and scenario building, etc.

Since the Co-operative of Mae Gum Pong is a small-scale co-operative, its story to some extent may not be able to represent the whole population of co-operatives. However, the lessons learned from this Co-operative can be applied to other co-operatives that are considering about setting the tourism business as an additional business. Many factors can be taken into consideration, yet all stakeholders seem to be satisfied with and supportive to the tourism. As a result, the hidden or foreseen predicaments should be noticed when making tourism development plans.

The distortion of social and cultural developments is hard to avoid when economic growth from the tourism is expected. This case study unveils that the sustainability is a means to achieve the balance of all developmental dimensions. No cases are perfect but how to reduce the imperfection is important, yet challenging. Mae Gum Pong community today has not encountered the problems as it is in the introductory stage of implementing the tourism business. Building scenarios, therefore, is essential for community tourism, no matter it is managed by the co-operative approach or other kinds of management.

Recommendations

Mae Gum Pong Royal Project Electricity Co-operative, Limited has an admirable attempt to initiate the co-operative based cultural tourism management for the sake of the Mae Gum Pong community at the micro level, of the co-operative at the meso level, and of the tourism industry at the macro level. However, as the Co-operative is relatively new in the industry and as it is based on the co-operative principles and values, certain insights are recommended as follows.

Since the tourism of Mae Gum Pong is in the introductory stage of implementing, people have been enjoying new dynamics derived from the tourism business. They have ignored potential problems that are likely to occur unless careful planning is conducted. These problems are engaged in four aspects; leadership, environment, culture, and benefit allocations.

Firstly, leadership is crucial for every management organization. In the case of Mae Gum Pong community, it has relied heavily on the chairman who in another role is the leader of the village. He is young, energetic, and creative. The idea of cultural tourism business was created by him and supported by the community. There seems to be no any potential successor to carry out the mission of the community. This may be because the community believes that he will be able to be with the community for a long time. To make the tourism of the community a sustainable one, building successors of him is indispensable. For the time being, it is appropriate to build the successors by learning and practicing with him. In the future, when he become older and less energetic, the built successors can take over his role at once.

Secondly, the environment of the community is a crucial resource that is as important as the cultural resources. The Co-operative has no clear plans in protecting or conserving the environment of the community. It should for example set a plan for receiving tourists to visit the community and the forest according to seasonal change. In this regard, there should be some parts of the year that the local people have to check if the forest is in a good shape and ecological system is in place. To do this, the local staff from the Forest Department can be helpful and local monitoring system should be established. People from young generation to the elderly people should be well trained and assigned a job on a rotation basis to look after the environment.

Thirdly, culture can be easily distorted when local people are tempted with materialism. The Co-operative should educate the local people to see tourism benefits as a supplementary income. They should be continuously encouraged to do their agricultural work as the main job and maintaining it as a cultural resource that tourists come to appreciate it. All the stakeholders should be aware that tourism contributes not only economic benefits, but also social and learning benefits. Tourists come to Mae Gum Pong to see different cultures that they cannot see in their home. As a result, keeping the local people educated on the value of their culture is crucial.

Fourthly, allocating tourism benefits to all stakeholders is vital. As learned from the case of Plai Phongphang where a conflict of interest occurred because the people living nearby the lumpoo trees were not given any benefit from the community tourism while they had to be noised with the influx of tourists. This can happen in any area when distribution of benefits is unfair. For the case of Mae Gum Pong, the main tourism income goes to the homestay providers whereas some people do not receive any benefit from the tourism. Rather, this group of people who have no income from the tourism may be affected by the tourism intrusion to their personal life. This may lead to a conflict or lack of cooperation from this group, thus creating more problems to tourism management than expected.

Although it is evident that co-operative based cultural tourism management brings about economic, social, and cultural developments, the Co-operative has to plan well how to sustain the happened developments in a systemized manner. Economic prosperity does not guarantee the happiness of the community. In this regard, satisfactions between the local people and the customers (tourists/visitors) should be balanced in a common interest of sustainability. If the Co-operative can make both parties satisfied with what they expect, they will help the Co-operative to do tourism marketing between them. Even though it is a big challenge for the tourism management debuts of the Co-operative, it is necessary for sustainable tourism development. A model of interactive marketing below should be useful for the Co-operative to carry out this challenging task.

Sustainability can cover three main aspects; ecology, social, and economy. Ecological sustainability, which means that tourism development does not cause irreversible changes in a given destination's ecosystem, is the most commonly accepted dimension, since there is an obvious need all over the world to protect natural resources

from the negative impacts of tourism activities. The general growth of environmental awareness has significantly contributed to this trend (Jafari, 1987: 32).

Social sustainability refers to the ability of a community to absorb tourism both the industry and the tourists themselves without the creation of social disharmony. Cultural sustainability in the context of tourism assumes that a given community is able to retain or adapt their own distinctive cultural traits against the pressure of both the so-called 'tourist culture' and the 'residual culture' of the visitors (Jafari, 1987: 32-33).

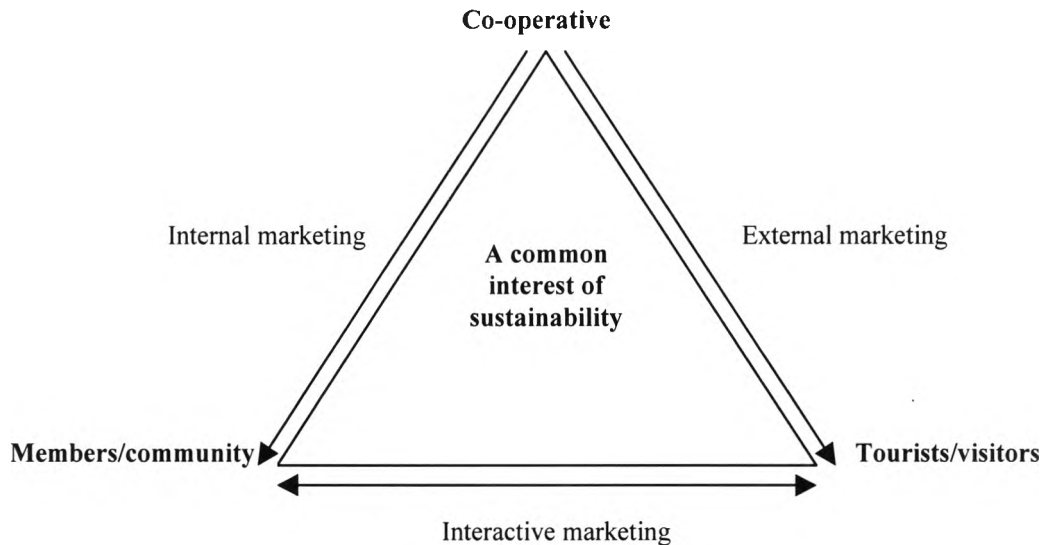
Economic sustainability refers to a level of economic gain from tourism that is sufficient to provide an appropriate income for the local community, when compared to the inconvenience caused by the activities of the tourism sector, and to cover all the costs of any special measure taken to satisfy the tourists, thus a precondition of economic sustainability is the attractiveness of an area and the perceived high quality of its tourist supply: without being in a competitive position in the world market, no destination can be economically sustainable.

High level of economic profitability must not be considered as a tool to cover over the damage done to social or natural resources, but the relative fragile nature of these latter must not create a planning environment where economic considerations are not being taken properly. Sustainable tourism development has to be economically viable and naturally and culturally sensitive at the same time.

Development and conservation can become mutually supportive, if people in the decision-making process see tourism as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Tourism is just one of many means that may be used to achieve economic, environmental, social and culture, and organizational sustainability.

Sustainability of tourism in Mae Gum Pong community should not only be involved by the Co-operative and the members/villagers, but also the tourists and visitors can participate in the sustainable tourism like the case of Khiriwonge Village where tourists are encouraged to join the reforestation and plantation activities. By doing this, the marketing development opportunity can occur to the Co-operative as the tourists and visitors feel interacted with the community in the sense of mutual development. Figure 5.1 exhibits the model of interactive marketing for co-operative based cultural tourism management.

Figure 5.1: A Model of Interactive Marketing for Co-operative Based Cultural Tourism Management



Source: Prepared for this thesis

The Co-operative has no clear directions to go for tourism development since it still see the tourism on a short-term basis. It should view the tourism business as the core product and keep emphasizing it on the philosophy of its management. Actually, the cultural tourism of Mae Gum Pong has much potential to grow productively, if well managed in a strategic way. In other words, it should establish a clear vision and mission by reviewing inside and outside factors. The inside factors include its strengths and weaknesses whereas the outside factors involve the opportunities, and threats surrounding it. Having found itself clearly really helps it to make plans systematically.

People will be good hosts when tourism is good for them. Planning by the destination's local planning department or by retaining planning experts from outside the destination results in a plan which is unable to effectively represent the diverse opinions, needs, and attitudes of residents toward tourism in their community. The chances of successful implementation of such a top-down plan is further inhibited by the lack of community support and involvement in the process, particularly in political systems where residents seek greater participation in the decision making of their community direction.

Residents of a community must maintain control of tourism development by being involved in setting a community tourism vision, identifying the resources to be maintained and enhanced, and developing goals and strategies for tourism development and management. As important, community residents must participate in the implementation of strategies as well as the operation of the tourism infrastructure, service, and facilities.

Resident population should be seen as part of tourism products. Hospitality is expected, but will not be found where residents are unhappy about tourism. Many destinations employ internal marketing campaigns to convince people that tourism is good and visitors should be respected and assisted, but these campaigns fall on deaf ears where problems are untreated and residents feel alienated from the decision-making process. In the case of Mae Gum Pong, the community residents should be trained and educated in tourism quality management in order to become quality tourism products. This is implying that hospitality is not enough for welcoming the tourists. Service quality is also required for the tourism business development.

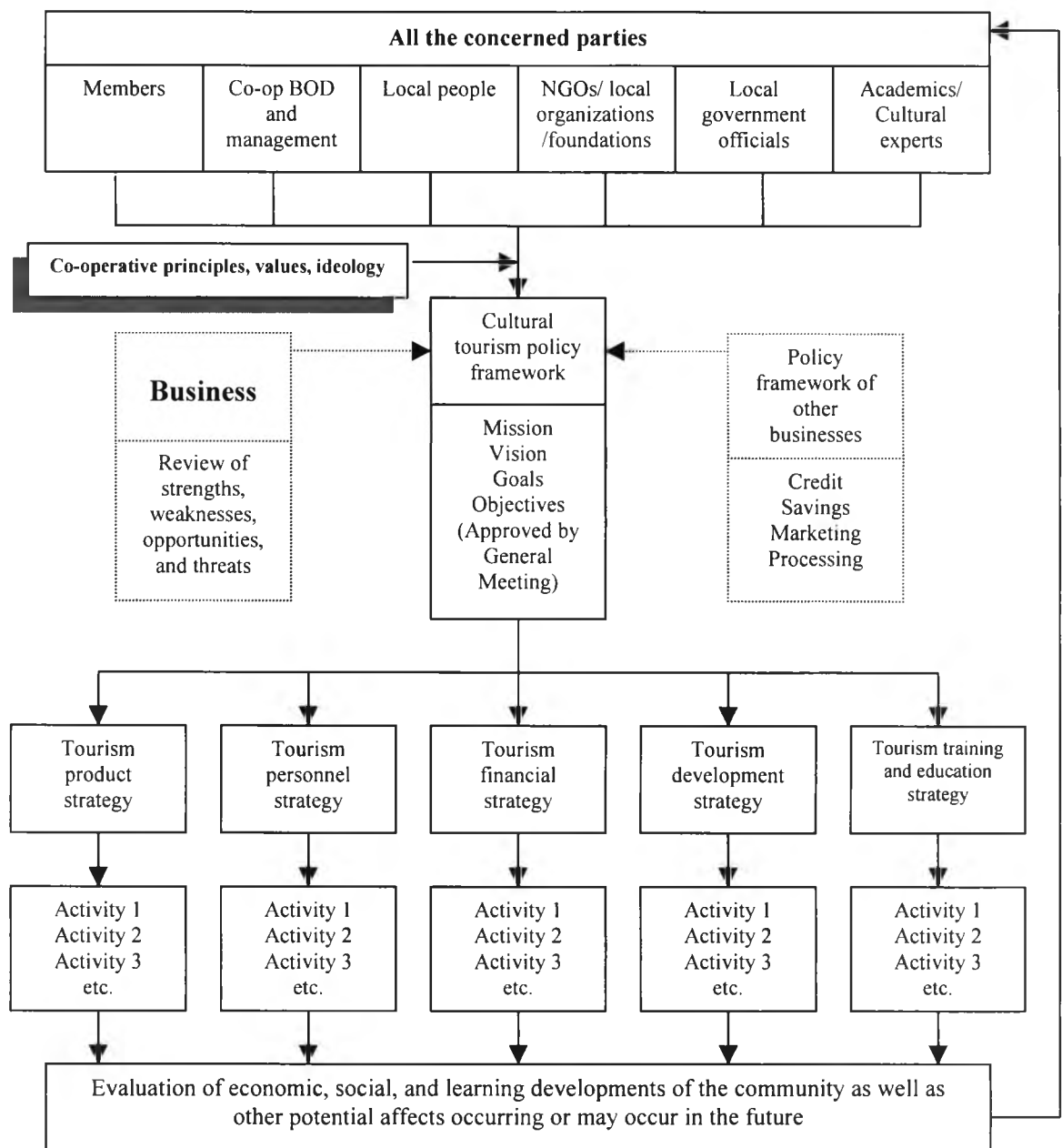
In addition, tourism development must provide quality employment for community residents. The provision of fulfilling jobs has to be seen as an integral part of any tourism development at the local level. Part of the process of ensuring quality employment is to ensure that as much as possible, the tourism infrastructures are developed and managed by local residents and access to financing for local businesses and entrepreneurs are central to this type of policy.

For tourism co-operatives engaged in general tourism services, including hotel reservations, air ticketing, group tour operations, etc., nowadays they have become more and more like commercial tour companies. The difference is just the name of the organization using the title 'co-operative', which will make it look good as running social welfare for its members. As a result, those interested in founding a co-operative to operate the cultural tourism business should be aware that genuine co-operatives have their own culture of management, whether principles, values, ideology, and practices.

Politically, the co-operative approach is based on democracy in which one member has one vote regardless of how many shares the one holds. Economically, establishments of co-operatives aim to cure economic problems of the members. This is

not necessary to make the members richer, but to create well being and quality of life for them. Socially, the approach has a clear-cut philosophy saying that a co-operative is for self-help and mutual help. It teaches the members to know the value of harmony and to help each other, which will bring peace and a proper order to the society. Technologically, cooperatives are learning centers where the members can learn and transfer the knowledge from one to one another.

Figure 5.2: A Comprehensive Model of Cultural Tourism Management for Co-operatives



Source: Prepared for this thesis

Co-operatives are widely seen in the rural areas that possess cultural and natural resources. These resources are precious for tourism business, thus creating employment and bringing prosperity to the respective community. Economic, social, and learning developments are the results of developing tourism business to match the local context. A rare number of co-operatives see this opportunity and ignore its hidden strengths in managing the cultural tourism business to be an optional business on top of the existing ones they are doing. Based on the case study of Mae Gum Pong Royal Project Electricity Co-operative, Limited, a model of cultural tourism management for co-operatives is created and shown in Figure 5.2 on the last page.

From Figure 5.2, the local participation should cover all the concerned parties rather than the local residents. These parties can also be alliances in the management. They share their insights to impose a cultural tourism policy framework with a sense of co-operative philosophical manners. The framework must be approved by the general meeting to get a consensus of the members. It should contain a set of strategic direction that the co-operative wants to achieve, including mission, vision, goals, and objectives.

Reviewing the business environment and considering about the existing policy of other businesses may be useful for drawing the tourism framework. This is to ensure that the latter framework is not overlapping the others, thus leading to inefficiency of resource management. To break down the policy into groups of tasks, strategies should be set in accordance with what the co-operative wants to achieve. Then, to bring the strategies into practice, a series of activities should be well designed. Regular evaluations will help reduce pitfalls or failures of management. The results of the evaluations will go back to the consideration of the panel of all the concerned parties so that necessary follow-ups or new formulas can be conducted in a due course. As the proposed model is comprehensive, it is recommended that co-operatives should adjust it to fit their specific culture and environment. However, it covers the basic principles of management; planning, implementing, and evaluating. Co-operatives should not ignore the principles. It is also suggested that the co-operatives should attune with the local community like the case of Mae Gum Pong. It is important to always realize that cultural and natural tourism products belong to the community and the co-operative are the management body.

For setting the mission, vision, goal, and objectives, co-operatives should have a checklist of questions to ensure that creating such a strategic framework of cultural tourism management will respond their actual desire. The checklist and examples are shown in Figure 5.3 below.

Figure 5.3: A Summary of Check List for Co-operative Based Cultural Tourism Management

<p style="text-align: center;">Mission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the tourism resources to be offered? - What are we going to do with the resources? - Who are the customers? - Who will be involved in the business? - Where should the tourism business be in the Co-op functions? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Mission (Example)</p> <p>To be a leading tourism co-operative offering cultural and natural tourism activities to eco-cultural tourists/visitors both domestically and internationally by working closely with the local community in order to generate supplementary income and promote the local resources in a sustainable manner.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where are we now in tourism business? - Where do we want to go or what do we want to be? - How will we go there? - When do we want to achieve that point? - Is it practical? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Vision (Example)</p> <p>To be one of the top ten most visited places in Chiang Mai Province within 5 years and win the national eco-cultural tourism awards within 7 years by a focus on total quality management and supports of strategic business alliances.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why is the vision set? - What benefits should be expected from the vision? - Who are the beneficiaries? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Goals (Example)</p> <p>To make known of the tourism area to potential markets and attract as many tourists/visitors as possible, which will lead to more employment creation and realization of local stakeholders to the cultural and natural values.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What activities are to be done? - How much or how many of units to be achieved? - What is the duration for each activity? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Objectives (Example)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To attract at least 10,000 tourists/visitors in the first year and increase the number at 20 % a year - To create an income of 500,000 bahts to community and increase 25% a year

Source: Prepared for this thesis

Future Research

In the midst of an overwhelming number of written works concerning community based ecotourism management, this thesis has made a research and development initiative for co-operative based cultural tourism management, which is quite rare to be seen. There have been still a number of different kinds of organizations operating rural tourism but remain ignored. It will therefore be great if those interested in researching the local tourism pay more attention to exploring other kinds of local organizations ambitious to run tourism in their respective areas. These organizations should include NGOs, foundations, schools, or even temples. This will be a research force to drive the tourism development in a larger extent, thus having more options for rural tourism management.