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Is Pai a Sustainable Tourism Destination?

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Abstract

Requested and sponsored by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), this study was carried to evaluate the implementation plan of the TAT sustainable tourism practice (the 7 Greens Concept) to Pai District, Mae Hong Son Province. Assessment tools included a questionnaire for domestic tourists visiting Pai (n = 200) and small tourism related business interview (n=15). Indicators applied to evaluate the outcomes from the implementation of 7 Greens Concept through tourists' questionnaire were structured in a meeting by the Director of the TAT Regional and Provincial Sectors of 20 persons. The results showed that the domestic tourists visiting Pai felt that tourism environments in Pai did not reach their expectation. Interviewees who are small tourism related business in Pai recognized that the TAT promoting conservation activities for sustainable tourism but only a few of them involved in the implementation of the activities.

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1. Introduction

The beginning of the idea, the term and concept of sustainability was initiated from the concern over aspects of conservation and resource usage (Miller & Twinning-Ward, 2006). Starting from the early twentieth century, the concept gained rapid recognition with the promotion and assistance of global organization such as the United Nations (UN), the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Weaver, 2006). Consequently; the regional organizations such as the European Union, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) were also emphasis on environmental conservation through significant publications such as Carson's (1962) *Silent Spring* and Hardin's (1968) *The Tragedy of the Common*. These environmental movements make human being understood and aware of the devastating environmental consequence caused by uncontrolled human activities (Miller & Twinning-Ward, 2006).

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The implementation of the sustainable concept was well established in forestry conservation including zoning for recreation purposes by the early twentieth century (Nash, 1968). In the late 1950's the concept has also been pragmatic to human use over the land and the outdoor recreation activities known as carrying capacity. Later the carrying capacity was extended and integrated with biophysical and societal aspects to create a more sophisticated carrying capacity concept (Mitchell, 1989). Therefore, sustainable development criteria can be viewed not only as an environmental policy that focus on the need to reunite the present and future economic stability through the environmental conservation, but also a development to increase the quality of human life (IUCN & UNEP, 1991).

It was at the UN Environmental Conferences held every 10 years from the 1st Conference in 1972 to the 5th Conference in 2012 where the sustainable concept gained noteworthy acceptance. In the third UN Environmental Conference in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro (informally known as the Earth Summit), Agenda 21, a well-known action plan and the final document of the conference was presented. However, from the 40 chapters of Agenda 21 tourism development is not notified. It was in the 1993 when the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was found and assigned the task including sustainable tourism aspect (Spindler, 2013) that the sustainable tourism concept is well established as a precursor to tourism development.

2. Tourism and Sustainability

Since sustainability is one of the most significant concept for tourism (Hall, 2009), Jafari (2001) provides a convenient framework for understanding the emergence and transition of sustainable tourism (Figure 1). Each stage builds on its precursors but it does not mean the earlier stages became less influential. Jafari explains these stages by the sequential presence of the 'advocacy', 'cautionary', 'adaptancy' and 'knowledge-based platforms or perspectives' (Jafari, 2001).

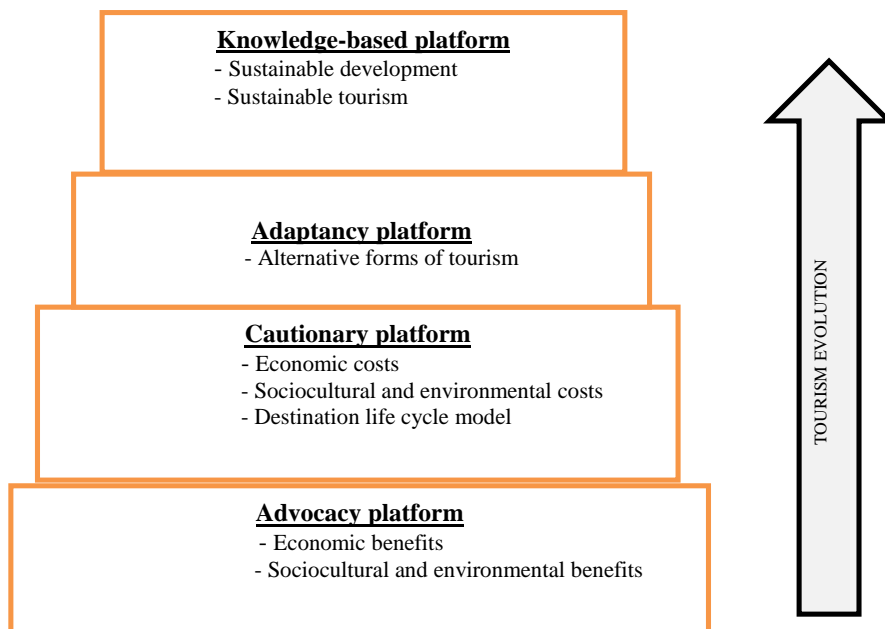


Figure 1: The emergence and development of sustainable tourism: 'Jafari platform'
Adapted from Jafari, (2001)

2.1 Advocacy platform

The first platform 'advocacy' emerged in the post-World War II period and being described according to strong support for tourism or pro-tourism perspective (Weaver, 2006). During the 1950s and 1960s, the tourism industry was recognized as an economic booster evidently from foreign exchange earnings, tax receipt and potential multiplier (Poon, 1993). The tourism products were seen as simple and reproducible, the potential for negative consequence was undisputed (Miller & Twinning-Ward, 2006). Additionally, tourism is believed as a tool to preserve destination unique environmental, cultural and historical resources on assumption that a portion of revenue earned from the industry can be allocated for maintenance purposed.

2.2 Cautionary platform

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was evident amongst tourism academics that mass tourism was a cause of widening gaps between rich and poor, increasing crime rates and disturbing local life styles (Doxey, 1975). The focus was also on environmental impacts of tourism (Budowski, 1976; Cohen, 1978), the sociocultural costs (Doxey, 1975) and economic costs of tourism (Bryden, 1973). The concept of carrying capacity is introduced in the hope of addressing the negative impacts of large scale tourism and recommended the limitation of human use over the land and the outdoor recreation activities (Mitchell, 1989). Furthermore, Butler (1980) presents a model of Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) which can be regarded as the finale of the cautionary platform that emphasized a high level of public sector intervention to ensure the reduction of negative impacts (Weaver, 2006).

2.3 Adaptancy platform

The rejection of the previous approach brought about the attempted to promote alternative (to mass) tourism which is a small scale environmentally friendly tourism in the early 1980s (Gossling, Hall, & Weaver, 2009). Alternative tourism tends to benefit the local community, preserve the tourism resources and alleviate poverty (Miller & Twinning-Ward, 2005). Ecotourism is one of the example of alternative nature based tourism that has been promoted worldwide (Weaver, 2006).

2.4 Knowledge-based platform

The failure of promoting alternative small scale tourism against the convincing mass tourism that generating revenue and employment brought about the idea of 'sustainable tourism development'. Sustainable tourism development that could applied to both small scale and mass tourism on the assumption that the outcome would be positive economic, sociocultural awareness, and ecological conservation (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987).

It can be concluded that the dimensions of sustainability which served as a basic for any development included economy, environment, and social equity concern. Economy dimension focuses on economic structure, public budget, regional aspects, consumption, labor and pricing. Environment dimension concerns are on environmental protection, biodiversity, resources, energy, air and waste control. Social/social equity cares for settlement structure, local culture, income and assets, security, mobility and public health (The Regional Office for Environmental Protection in Baden-Wuerttemberg, 1997).

Therefore, these economy, environment and social dimensions and concerns can be developed to indicators for evaluating outcomes of sustainable tourism implementations. The further application of the three dimensions of sustainability to tourism is constructed by Spindler (2013) to "Model of Sustainable Tourism" (Figure 2). The Model also includes cultural conservation and recreation activities that are appropriated to tourism destinations.

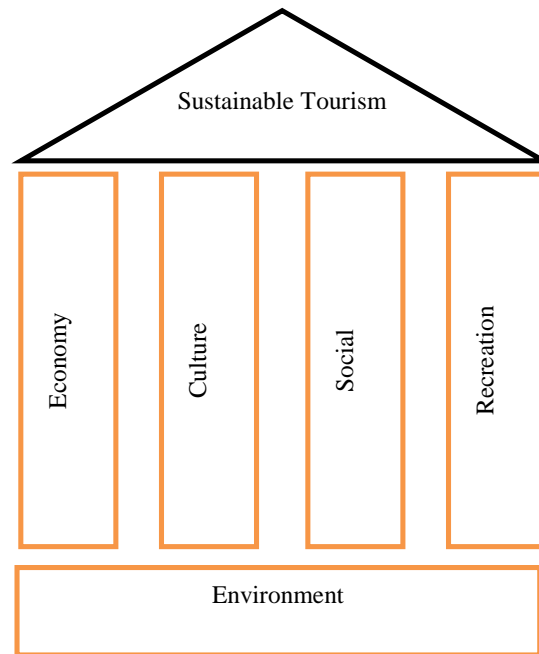


Figure 2: Model of Sustainable Tourism
Adapted from Spindler, 2013

3. Sustainable Tourism VS the 7 Greens Concept

From the main global trends towards sustainable tourism, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) began benchmarking and promoting sustainable tourism concept through the 7 Greens Concept, which can be categorised as. “Green Heart, Green Logistics, Green Attraction, Green Community, Green Activity, Green Service and Green Plus” (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013; Tourism Promotion Department, 2009).

‘Green Heart’ intends to increase stakeholders’ awareness in environmental conservation and climate change by practical advice in reducing carbon monoxide emission during the service processes. ‘Green Logistic’ focuses on energy saving transportation, green transportation such as bicycling, and substitution energy such as solar energy. ‘Green Attraction’ focuses on destination sustainable development and management with stakeholders’ participation. In addition, it includes the promotion of natural and cultural conservation, and economic stability. ‘Green Community’ intends to enhance local participation in sustainable tourism practice and management in order that community can preserve their way of life and local uniqueness. ‘Green Activity’ promotes recreation activities that compatible with local way of life and local resources. ‘Green Service’ promotes service providers with standard services and energy saving concern. ‘Green Plus’ promotes corporate social responsibility and cooperation in environmental conservation (Tourism Promotion Department, 2009). Table 1 compares the 7 Greens Concept with the dimensions of sustainable tourism.

Table 1: Sustainable tourism VS the 7 Greens Concept

Dimensions	Focuses	The 7 Greens Concept
Economy	- economic structure	
	- public budget	
	- regional aspects	Green Attraction
	- consumption	Green Community
	- labor	
Environment	- pricing.	
	- environmental protection	
	- biodiversity	Green Heart
	- resources	Green Logistic
	- energy	Green Service
Social/Social Equity	- air	Green Plus
	- waste	
	- settlement structure	
	- income and assets	Green Community
	- security	Green Logistic
Culture	- public health	
	- mobility	
Recreation	- local culture	Green Community
	- national culture	Green Attraction
	- recreation areas	
	- recreation activities	Green Activity

The 7 Greens Concept has been transformed into action plan and activities and implemented to many famous tourists' destinations in Thailand since 2012.

4. Methodology

To evaluate the implementation of tourism policies and plans, especially the 7 Greens Concept to Pai District, Mae Hong Son Province, multiple-methods were applied to collect data from different stakeholders. These multiple-methods included

- 1) Tourists' questionnaire (n=200),
- 2) Small tourism related business and local residents' representatives interview (n=15).

Using convenience sampling, domestic tourists were approached and asked to answer the tourists' questionnaire, which was comprised of close-and open-ended questions and the Likert scale to rank their perceptions towards 7 Greens.

Semi-structure interview questions were used to collect data from 15 respondents who operated small sized businesses such as souvenirs shops, food and beverage services, and car rental.

Indicators used to evaluate the outcomes from the implementation of 7 Greens Concept were structured in a meeting by the Director of TAT Regional and Provincial Sectors of 20 persons. Since the policy was established for a few years and limited activities were applied, it was agreed that the outcomes were vulnerable; therefore, only twelve indicators were applied to the tourists' questionnaire.

The interviews were aimed to solicit the opinions of local small businesses and local residents' representatives regarding the implementation of 7 Greens Concept, especially the process of implementation.

5. Results and Discussion

During the years of 2011 to 2012, the green activities implemented in Pai included the Pai River cleaning day, Tak Bart in the morning, bicycle day, visitation to Huey Nam Dung National Park and Thai Yai festival. Table 2 showed tourists' opinions regarding these conservation activities.

Table 2 Tourists’ opinions towards conservation activities

Activities	Agreed that the activities could possibly help in environmental conservation (%)
Pai River cleaning day	59.5
Tak Bart in the morning bicycle day	52.5
visitation to Huey Nam Dung National Park	52.0
Thai Yai festival	46.5
	25.0

Most tourists agreed that activities with immediate outputs and outcomes following the activities such as Pai River cleaning day (59.5%), Tak Bart in the morning (52.5%) and bicycle day (52.0%) could possibly help in environmental and cultural conservation. It was hoped that these activities would enhance stakeholders’ awareness in the value of the tourism environment and create a sense of belonging through environmental and cultural conservation activities while improving tourism products to meet tourists’ expectations.

The respondents were asked about their expectation and their experience in visiting Pai (Table 2).

Table 3 Percentage of respondents’ expectations comparing with their experiences in visiting Pai

Perception about Pai tourism	Expectation (%)						Experience (%)					
	5	4	3	2	1	mean	5	4	3	2	1	mean
-Pai has variety of natural tourism resources .	37.5	34.0	23.5	3.0	2.0	4.02	31.0	38.0	23.5	7.0	0.5	3.93
-Pai is a tourism destination that is well conserved.	24.5	46.0	24.0	3.5	20.	3.88	16.5	37.0	34.0	9.5	3.0	3.44
-Tourists had opportunity to experience local ways of life	29.0	34.0	26.0	7.5	35.	3.78	22.0	29.0	31.0	13.0	5.0	3.50
-Pai has interesting historical sites and culture.	19.0	40.5	35.0	4.0	15.	3.72	19.0	36.5	34.5	8.5	1.5	3.63
-Tourists can join cultural activities with the local people.	15.0	27.0	35.0	16.0	7.0	3.27	10.0	24.0	35.0	20.0	11.0	3.02

Remark: 5 = highest expectation, 4 = high expectation, 3 = moderately expectation, 2 = less expectation, 1 = least expectation

The results shown that respondents have high expectation towards Pai tourism, especially in terms of variety of natural beauty (mean = 4.02) and tourism destination that is well conserved (mean = 3.88). However, Pai tourism did not meet their expectation in every aspect, even though they though the TAT promoted activities might help in preserving natural and cultural environment.

Twelve indicators established from the TAT meeting were structured in the form of a Likert scale in the tourists’ questionnaire (Table 4) to gain tourists’ perceptions towards Pai’s tourism environment.

Table 4 Tourists’ perceptions towards Pai’s tourism environment

Tourism environment of Pai	Level of Agreement (%)					
	5	4	3	2	1	mean
Pai residents are good, hospitable hosts.	32.0	33.0	24.0	9.5	1.5	3.85
Pai has maintained its natural beauty.	18.0	50.5	23.5	5.5	2.5	3.76
There are adequate signposts, tourist information and a learning centre in Pai.	25.0	39.5	19.5	11.5	4.5	3.69
Tourists can become involved in environmental conservation activities with local residents.	22.0	29.5	29.5	13.0	6.0	3.49
There are bicycle lanes for sightseeing in Pai.	20.0	34.0	29.5	12.0	4.5	3.53
Tourists had opportunities to join local rites.	21.5	28.5	32.5	10.0	7.5	3.47
There are environmentally activities for tourists at Pai.	16.5	40.5	25.5	12.5	5.0	3.51
Pai can inherit its local cultural and heritage.	14.0	33.0	39.0	10.5	3.5	3.44
Local residents and tourists are aware of climate change and help reduce GHG by using less plastic bags.	14.5	37.0	30.0	10.5	8.0	3.40

Tourism environment of Pai	Level of Agreement (%)					mean
	5	4	3	2	1	
Pai residents have preserved their local life style.	14.5	24.0	32.0	22.5	7.0	3.17
Buildings and landscapes in Pai are unified with its environment.	14.0	34.5	28.0	14.5	9.0	3.30
Pai residents know their homeland well enough to give information about tourism destination to tourists.	11.0	25.0	32.5	18.5	13.0	3.03

Remark: 5 = highly agree, 4 = mostly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = less agree, 1 = not agree

From Table 4, it could be concluded that the majority of respondents highly agreed that the tourism environment of Pai in terms of natural and cultural environment were in a “green” condition, especially in the category, “Pai has maintained its natural beauty” (mean = 3.76). Respondents agreed that Pai residents could inherit and preserve local cultural and heritage, lifestyle and natural beauty, and allow tourists to join local rite and environmental conservation activities. “Buildings and landscapes in Pai are unified with the environment” was the condition with the highest percentage of “less agrees and least agrees”. Hence, Pai should establish an effective landscape planning.

From the small tourism business related interviews (n=15), it could be concluded that almost all of the interviewees recognised that the TAT promotes Pai towards a green destination, and some of them were involved in the conservation activities. However, they recommended that the TAT should increase the lines of communication to increase local businesses’ involvement, and to provide more opportunities for them to raise their voice concerning destination development. Other recommendations included providing a more effective waste management in Pai; promoting efficient water usage; and continuously supporting green activities such as beach promoting bicycling as a main transport for sightseeing. Additionally, the head of villages and local conservation groups should be well informed about the TAT policies and plans to motivate and educate residents to participate in the implementation process.

6. Conclusion

The results showed that the domestic tourists felt tourism environments in Pai did not reach their expectation in terms of natural beauty, variety of natural environment, conservation destination, and opportunity to experience local culture and local history. Interviewees who are small tourism related business recognized that the TAT promoting conservation activities for sustainable tourism. Even though the promotion of 7 Greens Concept through projects and activities enhanced tourism stakeholders’ s awareness of conservation, they recommended that the TAT should put more attention on conservation of cultural and local rituals as well as the conservation of natural environment. The focused should be on improving the implementation process to include more participation of local stakeholders.

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