Community participation for sustainable heritage tourism and development: The case of the Royal Thai Monastery Lumbini, Nepal*

การมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชนเพื่อการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวทางมรดกอย่างยั่งยืน: กรณีศึกษาวัดไทยลุมพินี ประเทศเนปาล

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to determine local community involvement in sustainable heritage tourism at religious and sacred places and to provide management recommendations on how to enhance community participation for the conservation of cultural and religious traditions. The study at the Royal Thai Monastery in Lumbini, Nepal revealed that although the Monastery has reasonable sustainable management strategies, community involvement is minimal. The local communities were generally satisfied with the management of the Monastery and tourism practice, although some improvements are needed. The study provides management recommendations to promote heritage conservation alongside sustainable tourism in the context of Thai Buddhist temples.

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บทคัดย่อ

จุดมุ่งหมายของเอกสารนี้คือการตรวจสอบการมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชนท้องถิ่นในการท่องเที่ยวมรดกอย่างยั่งยืนในศาสนาสถานและสถานศักดิ์สิทธิ์ และให้คำแนะนำการจัดการในการเพิ่มการมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชนเพื่ออนุรักษ์วัฒนธรรมและประเพณีทางศาสนา การศึกษาที่วัดไทยลุมพินี ประเทศเนปาลแสดงให้เห็นว่าแม้ว่าวัดจะมีกลยุทธ์การจัดการอย่างยั่งยืนที่เหมาะสม แต่การมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชนกับมีน้อย ชุมชนท้องถิ่นโดยทั่วไปพึงพอใจกับการจัดการของวัดและการปฏิบัติการการท่องเที่ยว แม้ว่ามีความจำเป็นต้องมีการปรับปรุงบางอย่าง การศึกษานี้ได้ให้คำแนะนำการจัดการเพื่อส่งเสริมการอนุรักษ์มรดกควบคู่ไปกับการท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืนในบริบทของวัดไทย

Introduction

The local community is recognized as the main stakeholder in cultural heritage tourism. According to Tosun and Timothy (2003), community participation is a vital element in the implementation of tourism plans and strategies. Community participation is fundamental in sustainable tourism development, which eventually leads to increased tourist satisfaction, better staff development, better tourism management plan and implementation. Lacy *et al.* (2002) added that community participation in tourism development can support and uphold local culture, tradition, knowledge and skill, and create pride in community heritage. The goal of community participation is to improve communication between stakeholders in the interest of facilitating better decision-making and sustainable development (Nampila, 2005). Other studies have affirmed the importance of local participation in the management of cultural tourist attractions (Cohen & Uphoff, 1977; Irwin, 1976; McGregor, 1960).

The Royal Thai Monastery in Lumbini, Nepal (henceforth, the Monastery) is the first Thai Buddhist temple in Nepal. The location and history of the place, being the birth place of Lord Buddha, is very significant not only for its religious function but also for its historic and cultural heritage values. This paper, therefore, aims to discuss the importance of community involvement in the planning and management of the Monastery.

Materials and Methods

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was used to explore the perception and level of community participation. The primary research data were gathered from 400 respondents sampled from surrounding villages, namely Ekala, Tenuhawa, Lumbini, and Madhubani through one-on-one questionnaire survey, consisting of both structured and open- ended questions. Semi-structured interviews of the respondents including Thai monks were also conducted alongside field observation. The quantitative data were statistically

analyzed and presented using graphs and charts. The relevant responses to interviews were presented in quotes. The existing management regime was evaluated using on-site observation and inventory checklist. A thorough literature review of relevant published information was conducted as source of secondary data and to support the research findings of this study.

Results

Description of the Study Area

The Monastery is the first Thai temple in Nepal, which was built with the support of all faithful Buddhists and the Government of His Majesty the King. It was built at the Lumbini Sacred Garden with the following objectives: (1) To pay deepest respect to the Lord Buddha, (2) To uphold Buddhism and cultural heritage tourism, (3) To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the accession to the throne of His Majesty the King of Thailand, and (4) To provide facilities and support to Thai and international pilgrims in Nepal.

The architectural plan of the Monastery follows the basic principles behind the symbols and functions of Thai temples. It consists of two parts: Phutthawat and Sanghawat. The Monastery, which reflects traditional Thai architecture, was designed by a national artist - Architect Associate Professor Dr. Pinyo Suwankiri. The Monastery plays an important role in society being the center for learning the Buddhist way of life. The Thai Monastery has significant cultural, historic, social, spiritual, aesthetic, educational, and architectural values. These heritage values incorporate both tangible and intangible elements. The Monastery, including its precious and beautiful architecture, has served as a significant social and spiritual inspirations to many Buddhists and non-Buddhists as well as by numerous architects and students

Management Attributes and Values of the Thai Monastery

The current management plan of the Monastery focuses on six aspects, namely, foreign relations, religion relation, education support, social welfare, construction, and missionary. As a Thai Buddhist temple in a foreign country, its management framework has been a fundamental basis to gain the acceptance and trust of the local communities, which can then lead to more support from them and attract more visitors. As a religious tourist destination, the Monastery has not yet developed an appropriate tourism management plan that does not compromise the cultural and historic values of the Monastery. Tourism is not the main function of the Monastery, but it is directly and indirectly its main source of income.

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The Monastery is closely linked to the community through religious functions, education and social services, and places where monks live. As a religious tourism destination, the Monastery provides Thai and international visitors basic facilities, accommodation, and a range of cultural and religious opportunities. for.

Demographic characteristics of participants

Gender: According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2012), the ratio of males to females in the four villages is more or less even. However, because these villages are known for having a male-dominated culture and males being better educated than females, the respondents in this study were mostly males (65%) against female (35%)

Age: Most of the participants were 18-25 years old (41.0%); the rest were 26-35 years old (36.3%), 36-45 years old (13.5%), and over 46 years old (9.3%). The adult family members, who claimed to be more literate than others, agreed to participate in the questionnaire survey.

Religion: The majority of respondents were Hindus, representing 91.0% of the sampled population, followed by 4.0% Buddhists, 2.3% Muslims, 0.8% Christians and 2.0% from other religious groups. Because very few Buddhists live in the sampled populations, the Hindus were the ones who are much more involved in maintaining and protecting the Buddhist temples.

Marital Status: Most respondents were married (62.3%), 31.0% were single, while 3.5% and 0.3% were widowed and divorced, respectively. The results differed from the study of Kharel (2007) who found that the Lumbini community entered into early marriage. These days, people prefer to stay single for a longer period of time.

Educational Level: The educational levels achieved by respondents are high school (27%), middle school (22%), uneducated (19.8%), bachelor degree (15.3%), elementary school education (14.8%), and master degree or higher (1.3%). The respondents in this study had higher educational achievements compared with those surveyed by Kharel (2007), who found that most were uneducated with very few attaining a master's degree.

Occupation: The respondents have a range of occupations. The top three occupations are student (23.0%), self-employed in business (22.3%) and farming (18.5%), followed by labor/worker at 9.5%. Educational opportunities are now becoming more accessible to the local communities. In comparison, farming was the dominant occupation of the population surveyed by Kharel (2007). This study found that more people are self-employed indicating that the local economy has improved over the years, although 3.5% remained unemployed. Employment includes those in travel agency/operation (3.0%), government (2.8%), hotels (2.0%), LDT (0.8%), and others (13.3%).

Community perspectives about the Monastery

As shown in Table 1, all but 1% of respondents were aware of role of the Monastery in the community. All the respondents said that they appreciated or 'like' the Monastery, but only 36.5% of them are familiar with Thai culture. Survey results showed that about half the respondents (51.5%) had received support/benefits from the Monastery.

Table 1 Local community perceptions about the Monastery

Question	Yes (%)	No (%)
1. Do you know about the Royal Thai Monastery Lumbini?	99.0	1.0
2. Have you been to the Royal Thai Monastery Lumbini?	99.0	1.0
3. If yes, do you like the Royal Thai Monastery Lumbini?	100.0	0.0
4. Did you learn about Thai culture from the Monastery?	36.5	63.5
5. Have you received any service or benefit from the Monastery?	51.5	48.5
6. Are you satisfied with the services you received?	65.5	34.5

The respondents also expressed favorable responses when asked about the general management strategy of the Monastery. The respondents suggested some management improvements in healthcare services and in the reduction of pollution and rubbish. They also suggested making all infrastructures/facilities within the Monastery open to the public and the provision of more interpretive materials, which architects and tourism planners need to incorporate in future design and planning.

Community participation with the Monastery

Community participation stakeholders is vital in sustainable tourism to ensure that major issues and concerns are understood and addressed (Hardy & Beeton, 2001). When 'sense of community' is established, it results in greater motivation to cooperate (Hitchcock, 1993). Phra Rajrattanarangsi, the Chief Abbot (personal communication, August 29, 2014) states that the Monastery has a crucial role in society. Because the local communities have positive opinion about the Monastery, it is expected that it will lead to more community support and participation. The questionnaire survey results (Table 2) show that 68% of the respondents have given some support to the Monastery, 39.5% have participated in activities at the Monastery, and 65.3% would like to participate with the Monastery in the future.

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Table 2 Local communities' participation with the Monastery

Question	Yes (%)	No (%)
1. Have you given any support to the Monastery?	68.0	32.0
2. Have you participated in any activities at the Monastery?	39.5	60.5
3. If No, would you like to participate in the future?	65.3	34.7

According to Phra Maha Suphot Kittiwanno, Chief Secretary,(personal communication, September 13, 2013), community contribution is mostly through voluntary donation of resources or human labor to support religious/cultural activities and other charitable projects of the Monastery. The Monastery returns these favors by providing food and drink. Examples of some past and current community involvement projects and support, apart from religion-related activities, are listed below:

a. Local communities join the Monastery in celebrating various events such as New Year's Day, Thai and Nepali Songkran Day, and Loy Krathong Day. Some local people also volunteer in cleaning up the venues after an event.

b. When the Monastery hold healthcare services for local communities, the nearby hospital send their staff to assist the medical team from Thailand. Also, some local people with knowledge of the English or Thai language serve as translators for the patients.

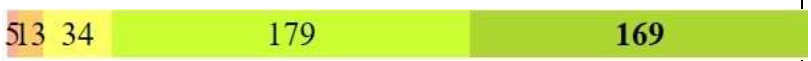
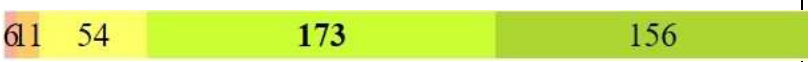
c. Some local youth who used to get educational support from the Monastery serve as volunteer teachers at the Monastery or at Metta Gurukul School under the patronage of The Royal Thai Monastery, Lumbini.

Unfortunately, the local communities have not been involved in any management aspect including tourism planning. A major issue in local participation in tourism is the lack expertise, low tourism management skills, and inappropriate qualifications. In some cases, external experts and advice may be needed, at least in the early stages of tourism development, to facilitate the learning process (Rockloff & Moore, 2006). However, local communities should not rely completely on external expertise and support. Thus, the Monastery should, in the future, encourage locals, who are knowledgeable about conservation and tourism, to join management committees and help establish goals, strategies, policies and protocols for conservation, management, presentation and interpretation.

Community perspectives regarding tourism

In rural areas, such as those in Lumbini, the diversification of employment created by tourism can help communities economically (Kreag, 2017). As tourism grows, additional opportunities are created for investment, development, and infrastructure spending. Table 3 lists the economic, cultural and environmental perspectives of the community regarding tourism in the Monastery.

Table 3 Local perspectives regarding tourism in the Monastery

Question	Mean	SD
Economic		
1. Tourism creates jobs for local residents 	4.20	0.907
2. The tourism industry employs local youth 	4.19	0.930
3. Tourism brings infrastructure to my community 	4.08	0.934
4. The money spent by tourists remains in my community 	4.04	0.962
5. Tourism raises prices for goods 	4.02	1.039
Social		
1. Tourism improves the standard of living in my community 	4.24	0.834
2. Tourism increases social services in my community 	4.16	0.864
3. Tourism brings new services to my community 	4.10	0.944
4. Tourism helps the community obtain services 	3.95	1.075
5. Tourism increases crime rates 	2.53	1.181

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Table 3 Local perspectives regarding tourism in the Monastery (cont.)

Question	Mean	SD
Cultural		
1. Tourism helps to stimulate local culture, crafts 	3.61	1.161
2. Tourism turns local culture into a commodity 	2.96	1.475
3. Tourism disrupts local activities 	2.62	1.306
4. Tourism harms moral standards 	2.46	1.290
Environmental		
1. Local residents have easy access to the areas which tourists use 	4.10	0.909
2. Tourism helps to improve the environment 	3.86	1.113
3. Tourists uses natural resources needed by local resident 	3.36	1.325
4. Tourism harms the environment 	2.59	1.444
Benefit and satisfaction		
1. I want more tourist in future 	4.84	0.481
2. Tourism is good for my community 	4.65	0.814
3. I benefit from the tourism industry 	3.98	1.345
4. I am satisfied with tourism in my community 	3.62	1.051
Frequency of: Strongly Disagree Disagree Fair Agree Strongly Agree		

This study found that most respondents agreed that tourism has positive impacts on the local economy. Although some non-local owners and corporations may have exported tourism profits out of the community, some respondents (n= 322) answered either "Strongly Agree" (n=138) or "Agree" (n=184) that the money spent by tourists remains in their communities. However, the majority of the respondents (n= 306) either strongly agreed (n=154) or agreed (n=152) that tourism is responsible for the increasing cost of local goods and commodities. As in many tourist destinations, the greater demand for goods, services, land, and housing can increase prices, which may be beyond the means of the local people (Kreag, 2017).

With respect to the social impact of tourism, the respondents strongly agreed that tourism has improved the standard of living in their communities and has increased the availability of social services, which are now more accessible. Most of the respondents did not think that tourism has increased crime rates. This is contrary to other studies that found a correlation between high crime rate and tourism (Catibog-Sinha, 2012).

When asked about the cultural impact of tourism, the respondents agreed that tourism stimulates local culture and crafts. They rated tourism "Fair" in terms of its effect on the integrity of local cultural ideals due to the increasing commodification of culture and disruption of their daily activities. However, they did not think that tourism harmed moral standards. On the other hand, studies of destinations with high tourism visitation had experienced social conflict and adoption of undesirable modern values leading to erosion of cultural identity/integrity (Mercer, 2000). Thus, tourism in the Monastery must be regulated so as to avoid these negative effects of tourism.

Tourist numbers are rising rapidly and the majority of the respondents (n=327) either strongly agreed (n=145) or agreed (n=182) that residents had easy access to the areas which tourists use. At the same time, increasing international interest in the area has raised local awareness regarding the environment. This study showed that 285 out of the 400 respondents either strongly agreed (n=133) or agreed (n=152) that tourism improved their environment. This is despite the fact that tourism, when not properly managed, can degrade the environment because of pollution (air, water, solid waste, noise, and visual) (Kreag, 2017). However, the respondents did not agree that tourism has harmed their environment. However, opinions on the extent to which tourists use or consume natural resources that are needed by residents themselves were rated "Fair". This is because, farmland, grassland, rivers, shrub land, forest pockets and river flood plains are common properties which provide benefits and services to the local communities. Many of the community members are dependent on these land

resources and any adverse effects on these common lands have direct and indirect implications on the livelihood of local people (IUCN Nepal, 2013).

When the local respondents were asked about what could be done to improve tourism in their community, some offered suggestions, while others preferred to remain silent.

The study showed that infrastructure development was the most popular answer (27%). The majority of the answers (n=134) refers to road construction, which would make Lumbini much more accessible, and hence, a strong pull factor in tourism. One respondent suggested that traffic lights are needed in the Lumbini area. Thirty-four respondents opined that the electric supply should be improved because the area does not have a 24-hour electricity service, while 11 noted that tourism in their community can improve with better transportation system.

However, 18% of the answers was about the improvement in local education wherein 121 responses indicate that providing good education to local people, especially women, would improve tourism in their community. A tourist information center, when available, can provide guidelines or tour schedules to enhance public education, communication, and interpretation. They believe that tourism personnel in the service and hospitality sector should be helpful and well-mannered so as to enhance better understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and improve the spirit of friendships between hosts and guests.

Sixteen percent of the answers from respondents were about improving the environment including the maintenance of clean air and water as well as nature conservation and protection of wild animals. Environmental concerns include the construction of environment-friendly buildings, maintaining the natural beauty of the place, and ensuring safe and peaceful areas/parks and general cleanliness of the surrounds.

Safety and health were also suggested by the local people as ways to improve tourism. Some respondents said that a good healthcare center for both locals and tourists is very important. Tourist protection, policemen, and a police station were also suggested by some respondents. The local people were concerned that some tourists do not follow some local practices and traditions merely because they have not been adequately informed or oriented of the local ways of life. They also suggested that tourism facilities including hotels, restaurants, public restrooms, sidewalks, parking, lighting, litter control and landscaping should be available to boost tourism.

Management Recommendations

Community involvement is an important concern in achieving sustainable tourism development., Phra Rajrattanarangsi, the Chief Abbot stated (personal communication, August 29, 2014) that "Management, administration, and operational aspects of the Monastery are performed by monks, novices, and nuns who live there. We do not have knowledgeable or qualified personnel in tourism management. We try to accommodate visitors and pilgrims as part of our missionary mission, but the main focus is on maintaining the site and religious practice."

In terms of heritage conservation and sustainable management, the Monastery should create more opportunities for locals to participate in planning and management. The Monastery should include people/organizations/companies from local communities, preferably those who have some knowledge about conservation and sustainable tourism, to join management and planning committees in setting goals, strategies, policies and protocols for the conservation, preservation, and management, of the Monastery. Nattapong Chaisaengpratheep (2013:655) suggested that providing certificates to individuals or communities who contribute regularly could motivate community's involvement.

Local community involvement and satisfaction is an essential component of sustainable development. The Monastery provides necessary charitable services to local communities including healthcare, social welfare, religious service, and educational support. Findings showed that about half the respondents (51.5%) had received support/benefits from the Monastery and all the respondents said that they appreciated or 'like' the Monastery. The Monastery also invites and allows visitors, pilgrims, and local communities to participate and contribute to these services. For example, when the Monastery holds healthcare services for the local people, visitors and pilgrims make donations or volunteer to help; a Nepali hospital sends personnel to help the Thai doctor and staff.Since the majority of visitors are Nepalese (45.3%) and Indians (24.3%), the local communities can be trained and employed as tour guides and site interpreters. Ronnagon Charoensri (2014:737) add that by providing personnel development program such as training in foreign languages and personality can betterment the service. In addition, other entrepreneurial members of the local community can be engaged in selling local crafts and products in the Monastery's souvenir shop. In this way, tourism benefits can be equitably shared among the members of the local communities.

Discussion/Conclusion

The Thai Monastery in Lumbini, which is the birth place of Lord Buddha, is one of the world's most famous cultural attractions. It is a Thai-Buddhist temple surrounded by local Hindu and Muslim residents. Even though, the Monastery are Buddhist-affiliated, they have received support and cooperation not only from Buddhists but also from Hindus and Muslims. Both the Hindu and Muslim residents respect and recognize the cultural heritage value of Lumbini. The collective effort to support and care for the Monastery is unique as it offers a cohesive sense of place among the people where trust and acceptance among non-Buddhist members of the community is also demonstrated. Such collaborative effort not only improves the attraction of the Monastery as a religious tourist destination but also a unifying force among peoples. At the moment, community involvement is mostly in terms of volunteerism by providing material resources and human labor to support the activities and charitable works of the Monastery.

In conclusion, the overall results indicated that the majority of the local residents were satisfied with the presence of tourists in their community because of the numerous perceived benefits of tourism. Several management suggestions were put forward to improve and sustain tourism. The involvement of the local community in tourism management is a major issue that have to be addressed to achieve sustainable tourism. The main management challenge of the Monastery relates to the development and implementation of a sustainable management plan which involves not only the religious groups in the Monastery but also the local people from the surrounding villages.. Currently, the management policy and decision-making of the Monastery are entirely in the hands of the Chief Abbot and the monks who have put much emphasis on the religious aspect. Thus, the decision-making process should be consultative. Given that the monks assigned to tourism-related tasks have inadequate understanding and knowledge about sustainable tourism in the context of cultural heritage conservation, they should be given basic training on sustainable tourism management.

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