

# FRAMEWORK CONSIDERATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE ECO-CULTURE TOURISM (ECT) DEVELOPMENT FOR ORANG ASLI OF ROYAL BELUM-TEMENGGOR FOREST COMPLEX, PERAK

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**ABSTRACT:** This is the subsequent paper of “Sustainable Eco-Culture Tourism in Royal Belum-Temenggor Forest Complex, Perak: Emerging Prospects and Challenges for Orang Asli” which primary focus is to present and discuss the framework considerations for a sustainable eco-culture tourism (ECT) development for Orang Asli communities of Royal Belum-Temenggor Forest Complex (RBTFC) in Perak. Review of literature on key success factors of sustainable ECT and inputs from the survey of local stakeholders in RBTFC were used to formulate the sustainable ECT framework. The proposed framework consists of four major action areas namely (1) identification of the ‘local champion’, (2) establishment of local organisation suitable for ECT, (3) integration of ECT into local economy, and (4) delivering quality of ECT through promotion and marketing. The proposed framework could be considered as an initial roadmap for future works to realise sustainable ECT development in RBTFC.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Previous studies carried out by Kamarudin *et al.* (2014); Razak *et al.* (2014); Abdullah *et al.* (2013); Ang and Chan (2009), have identified Royal Belum-Temenggor (RBT) as crucial tourism destination for the northern region of Malaysia. Combination of tourism resources/attractions/products from the pristine tropical rainforest and unique local Orang Asli culture, presented an opportunity for the development of sustainable eco-culture tourism (ECT) in RBT. Review of literature on sustainable rural tourism and current development planning of the RBT however have shown that there is no specific research work has been done specifically on formulating a suitable framework for planning and development of sustainable ECT. Without this framework, Twinning-Ward (2007) highlighted the potential risk of planning and development process undermining the area’s true potentials (if not, misleading potential tourism stakeholders or investors) for sustainable tourism development. In the long run, the absence of framework could impose constraint to relevant authorities/stakeholders in monitoring the tourism performance including identification of components that require urgent improvement actions (Kamarudin, 2007).

In response to the above matters, this paper presents the framework considerations for a sustainable eco-culture tourism (ECT) development with primary focus on the Orang Asli communities of Royal Belum-Temenggor Forest Complex (RBTFC), Perak. The proposed framework consists of four major action areas namely (1) identification of the ‘local champion’, (2) establishment of local organisation suitable for ECT, (3) integration of ECT into local economy, and (4) delivering quality of ECT through promotional and marketing. This paper also acknowledged the importance of proposed framework to be responsive towards local context by addressing local needs and readiness towards the idea of sustainable ECT.

## 2.0 SUSTAINABLE ECO-CULTURE TOURISM (ECT): KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Study on the literature suggested four (4) key factors in developing and ‘sustaining’ sustainable ECT activities (Figure 1):

- i. Leadership and ‘Local champion’
- ii. Community organisation
- iii. Integrated management system (including partnership and entrepreneurship)
- iv. Delivering quality

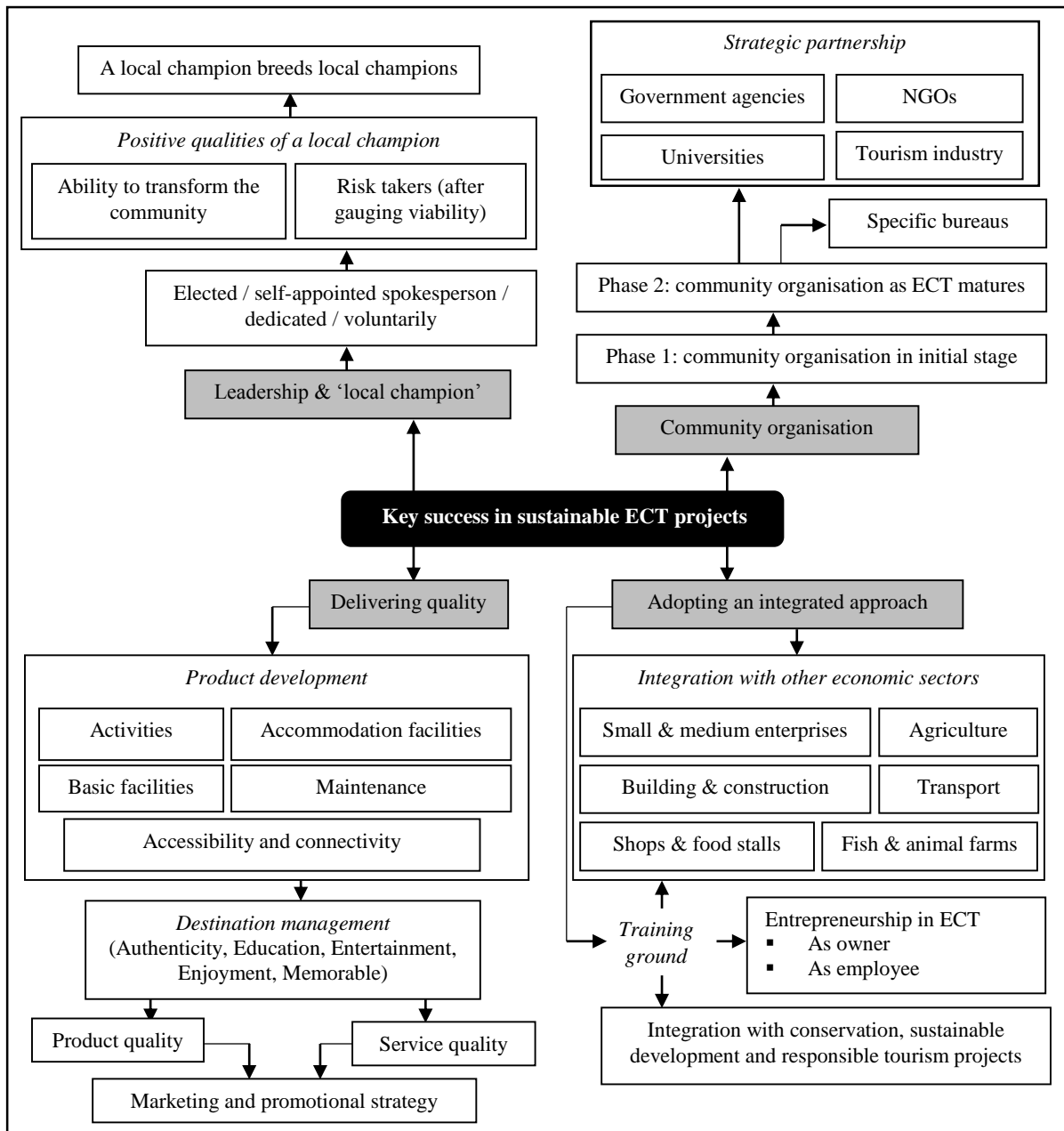


Figure 1: Key success factors for sustainable ECT.

Source: Adopted from Kamarudin *et al.* (2014); Kamarudin (2013) and TPRG (2010).

Detail explanation of all four key success factors of sustainable ECT from Figure 1 are explained as follows:

### 1. Presence of a strong local leader (Local Champion)

As mentioned by Kamarudin (2013: 297), one of the strength of sustainable tourism development in rural areas is the presence of a strong local leader (or leaders) who command respect and are capable of inspiring sense of ownership among the local community on tourism programs. The UNWTO (2005 in Graci and Dodds, 2010: 185) also points out similar encouragement that states:

“Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building.”

The long-term viability of sustainable ECT projects depend on “buy in” and continuous support from the local community thus, the presence of a strong leader is required to inspire (Stewart, 1994) and give a clear direction regarding the monitoring process. Based on the data collected during the fieldwork (in June 2014), the local leader of Kampung Semelor (*Batin Samad*) is seen to be a dedicated person who have initiated various local economic projects for the community including small-scale rubber plantation projects, *Kelulut* beehives project and sewing and

craft workshops for women (Research fieldwork in 2014). Under his leadership, Kampung Semelor has won a number of recognitions, including Anugerah Desa Lestari (Sustainable Village Award – Orang Asli settlement category) for year 2013 (Research fieldwork in 2014). In the case of Kampung Sungai Tiang, there is some issues regarding their local leader (Batin) since the Batin has moved out from his village to reside at a nearby island with his family (Research fieldwork in 2014). The absence of Batin as a leader to his people, has raised concern among the community about their future and welfare. In conclusion, both identified leaders are people of different situations and style of leadership. Nevertheless, both of them are carrying similar responsibilities towards the local communities' development. A leader or a "local champion", as suggested by Kamarudin (2013: 298), has to portray 10 positive qualities short-listed:

- |                             |                |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Visionary                | 6. Innovative  |
| 2. Good communicator        | 7. Resourceful |
| 3. Patient                  | 8. Trustworthy |
| 4. Courageous (risk takers) | 9. Disciplined |
| 5. Proactive                | 10. Sensible   |

In the case of Orang Asli communities in RBT, the presence of a strong and capable local champion is crucial as to motivate and empower other segments of their community especially women and youths to be involved actively in local economic development. These local champions, in future, might also continue to train or nurture new local champions from younger generations to carry out current works in developing sustainable ECT projects which they have initiated.

## **2. *Having a good and efficient ECT organisation***

The need for a good and efficient local ECT organisation to carry out planning, operation, monitoring and promotion of the programs is also another key challenges identified by this study. As Hart (1999 in Twinning-Ward, 2007: 16) points out:

“The single most important requirements for creating a sustainable community is to include all members in the creation process. The best ideas in the world will not succeed if only a small part of the community is represented.”

Based on a study by Kamarudin (2013) on rural tourism projects in three villages in the East Coast of Malaysia, it is often for tourism projects started in small-scale, less complex and manageable by local leaders (initial stage). However, as the projects grow and more tourists come and more players are involved in the projects, the nature of rural tourism has become more complex (mature stage). Therefore, experts' assistance is sought out to identify and develop a proper and practical business model for community tourism (Kamarudin, 2013). This is where the community need to establish specific bureau to manage tourism projects in their village and work closely with other partners including experts from universities, NGOs, tourism industry and government agencies (Figure 1).

However, based on a study by Kamarudin *et al.* (2014) on community resilience attitude in two Orang Asli villages in Royal Belum-Temenggor, have identified that the current organisation at village level are structurally unclear, with no specific tasks delegation and did not formally include every section of the community, especially youth and women's groups (Research fieldwork in 2014). Furthermore, in the two villages under studies also did not have a specific local organisation/committee that is in charge of planning for ECT (Research fieldwork in 2014). Based on feedbacks from local respondents, there could be a strong support by community members to take part into the establishment of local ECT organisation in future – if the community could pool talented and dedicated individuals from within the community, with active participation by every section of the community including women and young people, and working closely with other partners as mentioned in Figure 1.

## **3. *Integrating ECT with other economic activities***

Ideally, tourism development at village level could be more effective once it is well integrated with other rural economic sectors (to utilise the potential of tourism in supporting other economic activities). As shown in Figure 1 and in Figure 2, both villages are located within the areas of many of natural and cultural resources, suitable for ECT projects. However, the communities did not take full advantage of these potentials due internal and external issues such as lack of capital, lack of knowledge and training on management of tourism businesses and lack of interest among community members to initiate the ECT projects. Local communities' attitude together with external issues has, in turn, create "missing links" between community, ECT and other local economic sectors (Figure 2). Presumably, with the establishment of a sustainable ECT project in future, local communities and other local economic sectors could work together and harvest the direct and /or indirect benefits from sustainable ECT including

through jobs creation, income generation, conservation local cultural resources and protection of crucial natural resources and environment for tourism purposes.

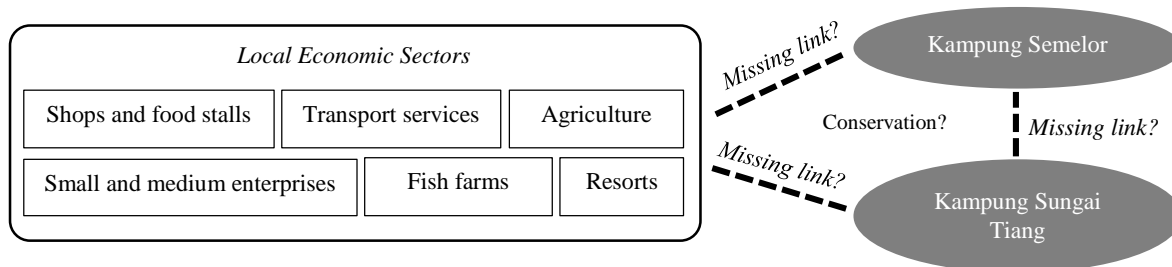


Figure 2: Integration between tourism and other economic activities.  
Source: Research fieldwork in 2014.

#### 4. Delivering quality in ECT products and services

The fourth key success factor of sustainable ECT is ensuring the quality of products and services to be delivered to tourists during their stay and visit in any ECT destinations (Figure 1). Two main strategies can be adopted namely; (1) development of ECT products – these includes offering attractive activities, provide basic facilities to support ECT activities, affordable accommodation facilities with good maintenance and enhance accessibility and connectivity between tourists, host communities and ECT products. The second strategy on the other hand, emphasised on management part to ensure ECT destinations to deliver an excellent, enjoyable and memorable visiting experience to each tourist/visitor. Delivering a high quality products and services could portray good image of ECT destinations and this is important to be highlighted during marketing and promotional process.

### 3.0 THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK AND DISCUSSIONS

This section explains the proposed framework of implementation of sustainable ECT project including processes in implementing the framework and positioning the framework within the sustainable ECT planning process. Based on the study on sustainable ECT, this study has decided to adopt a standard or generic form of planning process (as shown in Figure 3) based on following reasons:

1. The existing tourism planning process is still relevant, sound and broadly applicable. This is evident since similar planning process is also implemented by other non-tourism related fields such as rural planning and social planning.
2. Using existing planning process where all stakeholders were already familiar with, could potentially reduce resistance and scepticism. Setting up and running new or mainly experimental planning process normally require longer time (time consuming) to be understood, accepted and adopted by potential users, especially the rural communities.

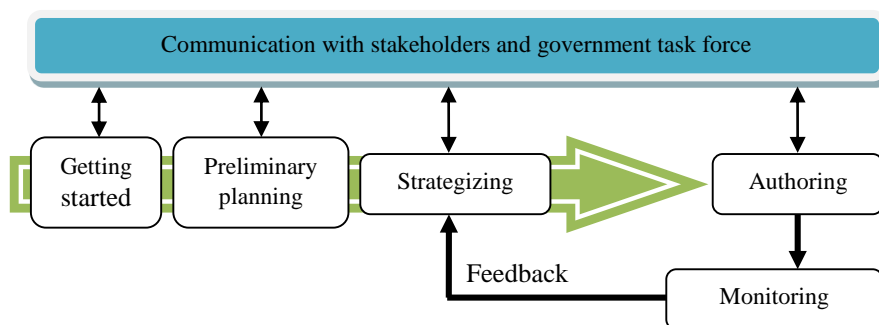


Figure 3: Five stages of sustainable ECT planning process. *Source:* adapted from TPRG, 2009; Ngah, 2009 & 2003; Marzuki, 2008; Twinning-Ward, 2007; NSGIC, 2006.

The sustainable ECT planning process also incorporated the same basic planning processes components as practices in non-tourism field in Malaysia. For generalisation and wider use of CBRT planning process outside Malaysia, however, might need further examination to evaluate its suitability and adoptability. This study has implemented the following form of sustainable ECT planning process with five main stages were identified as: Getting Started, Preliminary Planning, Strategizing, Authoring and Monitoring (Figure 4).

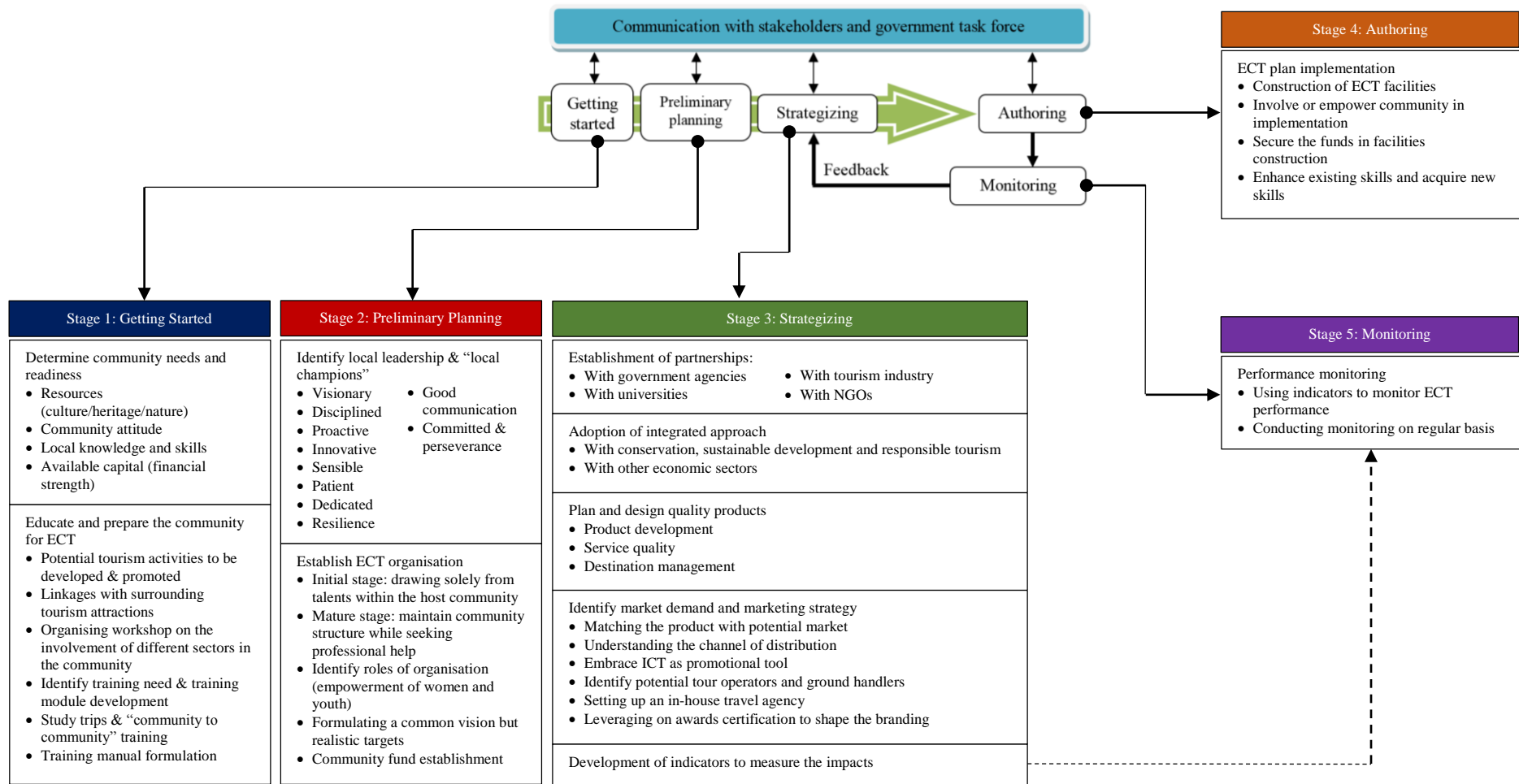


Figure 4: Proposed framework for a sustainable ECT

Source: adapted from Kamarudin *et al.* (2014); Kamarudin (2013); TPRG (2010 & 2009); Ngah (2009 & 2003); Twining-Ward (2007); Kamarudin and Ngah (2007), Steck *et al.* (1999) and Research fieldwork in 2014.

Figure 4 shows the five stages of sustainable ECT planning and managing process. Some relevant inputs gathered from review of literatures (see Kamarudin *et al.*, 2014; Kamarudin, 2013; TPRG, 2010 & 2009; Ngah, 2009 & 2003; Twinning-Ward, 2007; Kamarudin and Ngah, 2007; Steck *et al.*, 1999) were included as supporting evidence. In the proposed framework, a feedback cycle was included to ensure that progress towards achieving sustainable ECT goals is being monitored and that necessary amendment or improvement can be made for changing conditions. The diagram also represents sustainable ECT planning process in a most simplified view to the potential users. It is important that during every stage of the planning process, constant communication and feedback to be maintained. Working closely with all ECT stakeholders through the planning process is needed to create trust and improved cooperation especially in developing, managing and monitoring the sustainable ECT progress.

The proposed framework could be used as a reference during initial stage of planning for sustainable ECT especially to identify the local community needs and readiness in the study areas. Preliminary results should be able to determine or point out some information including what is the current stage of ECT development for each village, progress which has been undertaken/not achieve to date, and areas for future improvement.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

As noted by Graci and Dodds (2010: 186):

“In order for sustainable tourism to be achieved, one must measure what they manage”.

Many scholars in tourism (see Kamarudin, 2013; Graci and Dodds, 2010; Twinning-Ward, 2007; Miller and Twinning-Ward, 2005), have highlighted the importance of measuring of tourism performance as a means towards achieving sustainability goals. However, looking at ECT from a more holistic context, i.e. from the initial stage (getting started) until the monitoring stage, one could not deny that achievement of sustainability goals cannot be realised without first putting in place all the crucial elements – in a more systematic way i.e. having a framework for guiding the planning, development and management processes.

This paper has addressed this requirement by proposing a framework for developing and ‘sustaining’ sustainable ECT with highly considered of the four key success factors in ECT as presented in Figure 1 that are: leadership and local champion, community organisation, integration of ECT into conservation and other local economic sectors, and delivering quality for ECT’s products and services. The subsequent section then continues with discussions of the proposed framework including the five stages of sustainable ECT planning processes namely; getting started, preliminary planning, strategizing, authoring and monitoring with details of each step elaborated in Figure 4. The tourism planning process in Malaysia is similar to any other development planning processes, and this has been widely accepted by tourism authorities and local host communities in many tourism destinations. It is hope that the proposed framework will be useful in guiding the planning, development and monitoring of sustainable ECT performance at every stage as mentioned.

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