

VIEW ON LOCAL COMMUNITY AND URBAN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN MELAKA CITY: A CASE OF A CITY IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

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ABSTRACT: *Literature on local community and their involvement in urban tourism especially in developing countries has received little academic attention. This gap requires more exploration. Therefore, this paper addresses the issues of local community and urban tourism development of cities in developing countries in which Melaka City has been selected as a case study. This is due to the increasing profile of heritage and cultural based-tourism that portrays strong interest of government in using tourism as a development tool. Thus, a case study methodology has been employed and a qualitative method was chosen in which interviews were conducted. The key information sources are based on the perspectives or views of those responsible for tourism planning in the city as well as representative from the local and having direct communication with government agencies. The findings reflect political, cultural and social factors in the case study as well as ambition and needs for economic expansion and improving quality of life.*

Keywords: Urban tourism, developing countries, qualitative approach, Malaysia

Introduction

Theoretical background in the context of the study

According to Sharpley and Roberts (2005), the political, economic and socio-cultural environment must be taken into consideration to identify appropriate actions in developing urban tourism. Equally important is the participation of the local community and resource allocation that is fair enough to satisfy or solve issues that exist in the city before preparing any tourism development strategy. Thus the success of a tourism development strategy not only applies to the indicators outlined in product and infrastructure development, marketing and visitor management, but also to the views of local residents or the community, and the tourists.

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As noted by Haywood (1997), in positioning cities as tourism destinations, the emphasis should be given to visitor and community strategies. Inskeep (1991) argues that planning for tourism should consider more comprehensive and integrated approaches that are able to serve and understand the whole system other than tourism itself. At the same time, this approach must also be able to work simultaneously with other approaches that are concerned with aspects of sustainability such as the environment and the local community. In this context, Williams (1998) suggests that there are clear links between planning and sustainable tourism. This is because planning allows intervention for sustainable tourism, which is not only concerned with conserving resources for the tourism industry, but also maximizing the benefits to the local population.

Furthermore, Russo and van der Borg (2002) also noted that by investing in cultural attractions and infrastructure, cities will be able to secure a niche position in the international tourism map, and therefore develop an industry that is sustainable and has plentiful synergies with other strategic sectors of the urban economy. They suggest that, in the context of the city, elements such as cultural heritage can be conceived as precious resources for the city economy and the local community development, rather than as a burden for the city government in the planning context. Thus, Maitland (1997) asserts that the strong links of tourism and leisure to work with local firms and other initiatives at local level would then increase the support from the local population. Long (2000) from this point of view addressed that characteristics and motivational factors for partnership in tourism development should consider the expression of a political platform in terms of ideology, local pride and concern toward community, quality of life and environment.

Hinch (1996) further discusses urban tourism strategies in terms of the role of the community. Based on this, the concept of 'who sets and implements' leading to a community-organisational approach has been seen as vital (Figure 1). According to Hinch (1996), the approach is based on two important elements of the community, which are:

- i. Urban community which refers to the people-place relationship of the destination.
- ii. Business community which refers to commercial enterprises that receive direct benefits from tourism.

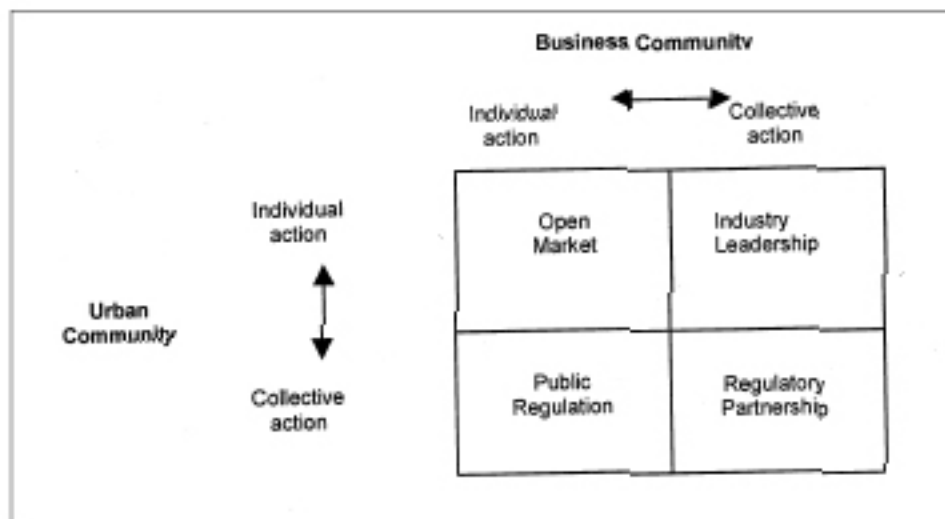


Figure 1: Community-organisational approaches to sustainable urban tourism
(Adapted from Hinch, 1996)

Meanwhile, each element of the community consists of two characteristics, which are:

- i. Individual conscious and unconscious action based on community roles as consumers and citizens.
- ii. Collective action that represents conscious decisions by each of the communities or their recognised leaders.

Based on this, four basic community-organisational approaches have been identified (Hinch, 1996). These can be described as:

i. Open market

Tourism operators and tourists act based on their own interest. At the same time, communities also act independently whether they support or oppose urban tourism activities. This means that tourism is less integrated and leads to a short-term strategy since the business community attempts to get benefit as soon as possible. This approach is likely not to favour sustainable urban tourism if it denies public interest.

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ii. Public control/regulation

Characterised by the involvement of the public sector to ensure individuals in the business community do not take advantage of the public interest. The urban community as a whole takes collective action to prevent any negative threats that emerges. This has weaknesses in terms of bureaucracy and the burden of control and regulation for small business, and can be more political rather than public interest. This approach is appropriate if both communities are involved together in designing the plan and during implementation.

iii. Industry leadership

This approach inclines to be presented as 'individual involvement within the urban community and collective involvement within the business community' (Hinch, 1996:105). However, this approach is sensitive to the self-interest that leads to changes of view by that particular individual, which is difficult to sustain with commitment for programmes or projects in the long term.

iv. Regulatory partnership

The urban community and the business community are both involved at a collective level and work as a partnership. Both parties will 'check and balance' each other and influence authority for the implementation of strategies. However, time and commitment of the partnership, and the need to establish a fair process are potential problems of this approach.

The findings of the study will examine the implication towards the condition that has been discussed above.

Methodology

In-depth interviews

A total of 21 in-depth interviews were conducted, and the respondents were selected on the basis of a combination of criteria. The criteria of selection for respondents

were based on their position and experience. Their knowledge, for example, through attending higher level meetings at the state government are important for the research to understand decision-making and implementation in planning for tourism. The actual fieldwork in Melaka City was conducted from April 8th to June 20th, 2008. The classification of interviews, according to categories, is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: List of respondents/interviewees

Organisation	Number
1. Government	
• Melaka State department/agencies and Melaka City local authority	8
• Federal - Planning organisation	3
• Federal - Tourism organisation	2
2. Tourism Associations (Private sector and NGOs)	4
3. Tourism/Planning consultant	4
Total	21

Interview method

A number of basic questions were designed and worded to guide the dialogue, or conversation, without interfering with the spontaneous flow of the interview as well as following the criteria that they should avoid with leading and complex or multipart questions (Bryman, 2001). The researcher also needs to appear naïve during the interview about the topic as outlined in the guided questions. According to Yin (2003, 91), this allows the respondents 'to provide a fresh commentary about the topic, otherwise, the "corroboratory purpose" of the interview will not be served'. New questions raised from previous interviews are also repeated to other respondents, in order for the researcher to determine the understanding of certain aspects or issues that exist. In this case, the set of basic questions was developed from one interview to another, depending on whether the question is appropriate to that particular respondent.

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Structure of the Findings

As a result, themes or sub themes that are able to provide understanding for the aspect that becomes a major concern to the aim of the research are identified. From the view of the local community's involvement, the emerging themes were clustered or grouped on the platform of argument or discussion that focused on the issues that can be concluded in the next section.

Discussion of Findings and Implication

Local Communities

There was no serious involvement of local communities at the early stage of tourism development in Melaka City. This only began to change after 2000 due to the appreciation of unique cultural aspects for tourism. This involves communities living in Melaka City such as Peranakan Baba Nyonya/Chinese, Portuguese, Chetty and Melayu Kg. Morten. In this context, local community views are increasingly important and the government through their agencies began to build good relationships with the communities. As a result, local communities began to feel more appreciated and trusting of government agencies. Therefore, this requires city governments to promote initiatives with local populations in order to increase support at that level.

Thus, the findings reveal that the existing structure has been used by the government to communicate with local communities for the purpose of tourism development. Within the structure, the leader acts as a representative, this normally has a good relationship with the government. This structure also has political advantages as the government uses the leaders to reach to the grassroots. In this case, the leader has an important role to seek consensus about any issue before it comes into discussion with the government. Here, the findings indicate potential problems, which are whether the leaders or the committees are able to really reach down to the grassroots and then convey their opinions to the government.

One of the important structures is the Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK), which plays an important role as the dominant group and official representative in representing the community to the government. Several other committees exist,

which represent interest groups for religious, cultural or business reasons. The findings disclose that most of these committees have the same main objectives, which is to ensure their existence and protect their interests. Most of the committees are registered with the government and the leader of each committee has their own channel and political influence on government. One example is the Melaka Heritage Trust, which was formed as an NGO to represent all local communities in Melaka City for issues related to conservation and preservation. It has a place in the government structure and has been taken into important meetings at state government and local authority levels.

Based on the literature (Hinch, 1996), two approaches to community-organisational engagement in relation to urban tourism can be determined. The first is industry-leadership, where community relationships with the government very much depend on the leader of the community. The question remains if the leaders are able to represent all the interests of community and the risk it may involve with regard to self interest, whether in the context of political advantage or business opportunities. The second is regulatory-partnership, where business groups and non-business groups attempt to achieve collective decisions between them and then influence the government. The question is raised whether each group or committee is able to collaborate, with their different emphasis and interests, and therefore establish a fair process that benefits all parties.

In terms of the local community acceptance, there is a dilemma whether they should be involved seriously in tourism. Some aspects of culture are no longer relevant for everyday life, while certain government projects seek to enhance these areas for tourism and are not really pleasing to them. The findings reveal that there is a need for the government to improve relationships with certain communities such as Peranakan Baba Nyonya and Chinese. Despite the increasing interest in tourism, the local communities do not have clear objectives as to what they should achieve in tourism development. For the government, the idea of the local community involvement is clear, which is to preserve their cultural activities, and to use them for tourism purposes. Nonetheless, government efforts prior to 2000 increased local communities' appreciation of their cultural value. One of the efforts by the government was to secure the physical existence of the area of the local communities as part of the conservation and tourism development programme. At the same time, this is also part of the effort to nominate Melaka City as

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a UNESCO World Heritage Site with its prospects for tourism activities. This makes for a sense of pride for communities about their existence.

The findings also revealed that the efforts by the government to involve local communities can be politically oriented. This relates to government policy and political arguments towards local communities such as those living in the inner city, or the old quarter of the city. This is where the community such as Peranakan Baba Nyonya and Chinese live. Prior to 2000, development planning by the state government was not preferable to this area. However, tourism development has been used as a reason to win support, and the change of government policy to develop their areas reflects the support from certain groups of these communities in the 2004 election. In addition, the response of these communities also relates to the repeal of the Rent Control Act 1986 in 1997 by the government. This provides opportunity to business-oriented groups from the Peranakan Baba Nyonya and Chinese communities to take advantage of the potential of heritage properties in the inner city for tourism business. Their attention was more favourable to tourism even though they received less help from government, while before the repeal of the act, original residents or tenants did not care much about their involvement in tourism.

For some other communities such as the Portuguese, their approach was to be close to the government and this was an advantage in receiving financial support and tourism projects in the local community areas. In this case, to prove that they are interested and capable to be involved in tourism is part of the way for the community to have development in their area. For the government, this approach can be seen as one approach that benefits two parties as it meets the objective to provide infrastructure to both local communities and tourists.

Conclusion

The findings above have shown that three important characteristics and motivations of partnership with local communities are applied in Melaka City. These involve the desire of the government to achieve results in tourism development through economic opportunities, a dependency on the locality for votes and the expression of a political platform for the community. In this context, the findings revealed that uniqueness of local culture living in the urban areas of developing countries such as in Melaka City

has forced the government to provide better treatment to local communities, as well as making efforts to win political advantages through tourism development. In addition, the government's approach to involve local communities might seem less concerned with a sustainable approach to planning for tourism, and not because of the interpretation of sustainable development that requires the government to be more responsible in maximizing benefits to the community. The action is rather for the advantage of tourism economy as a whole. In this case, the understanding of sustainable tourism is coincidental with the importance of local culture and to expand the image of tourism in Melaka City.

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