

## **Development Strategies of Community-Based Ecotourism in Nang Phaya Sub-District, Thapla District, Uttaradit Province.**

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**Abstract:** *As the trend of culture and nature-based tourism is becoming popular, there are more and more visitors to the area of Nang Phaya Sub-district, which is a tourist area with biodiversity. The objective of this study was to study tourism strategies based on tourism biodiversity by collecting data via in-depth discussions and group discussions among local leaders, sages, administrative officials in Nang Phaya Sub-district, Uttaradit Province, and stakeholders. The study found that the suitable strategies to develop the biodiversity-based community's tourism consists of: the strategy on tourism and environmental resource management; the strategy on participation of local people; the strategy on tourist service and provision of infrastructure; and the strategy of marketing promotion and tour guide services. These strategies are to be sustainably implemented in the planning and development processes of the community tourism of Nang Phaya based on its biodiversity.*

**Keywords:** *tourism development strategy; community tourism; biodiversity.*

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### **I. Introduction**

In Thailand, natural resources and the environment are the key resources of the country that lead the national economy by generating jobs and income for the citizens. Tourism is very important for the country in many aspects such as the economy, society and culture, nature, and the environment. Culture and nature based tourism is one of the strategies that has been supported and promoted by the government and organizations. As of today, the tourism industry as a service industry generates enormous income for Thailand (Ministry of Energy, Energy Policy and Planning Office 2011). However, the deterioration of Thailand's natural resources has become a controversial issue between the natural resources sector and the service industry sector. This controversy is what has brought the current situation of Thailand's tourism to attention. Many of nature-based attraction sites have become popular while nature and wildlife habitats have become degenerate.

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that tends to involve with visiting vulnerable natural areas while also being responsible for the area, conserving and improving the well-being of the local people. As the trend of ecotourism is becoming popular, visitors are dramatically increasing in Nang Phaya Sub-district area. The popularity of the community can be recognized from a Facebook business account named สักกะนางพญา (Love Nang Phaya) with more than ten thousand subscribers and a number of online check-ins and shares.

With the rising number of tourists in the area, some reckless behaviors cannot be controlled by the authorities. The local environment and natural resource are constantly being destroyed by tourist activities such as camping, trekking, and biking. The most common behaviors found in the area include non-biodegradable littering, unnecessary wood chopping for cooking fuel and campfires, disturbing wildlife habitats, and the unauthorized collecting of plants and wildlife. These reckless activities were found more frequently during the high season in winter time, which causes damage to the nature and ecosystem.

Nang Phaya Sub-district is a community with rich biodiversity and unique culture and wisdom. With an effective strategy on natural resource management by tourism-related stakeholders, it will become a great attraction site of the community. To develop ecotourism in Nang Phaya sub-district, value must be added to the production and service sectors while preserving the ecosystem and nature. The major advantages of Nang Phaya Sub-district include a biodiversity-rich environment, local wisdom and the unique culture. These are the aspects of the community that will be directly affected if the tourism continues to grow with ineffective planning in the community. If the ecosystem cannot be preserved and is consistently being deteriorated, then the ecotourism and popularity of Nang Phaya sub-district will decline. In this study, we focused on the problem, context, and potential of ecotourism in Nang Phaya sub-district to develop strategies for natural resource

conservation and management in order to improve the sustainability of the nature area while promoting ecotourism.

## **II. Literature Reviews**

**Biodiversity of Thailand** Biodiversity or biological diversity means the state of having different kinds of organisms in an area of ecosystem. That is to say, there are various species, genes, and ecosystems in this world. Biodiversity is one of Thailand's advantages. It involves ways of life, cultures, and local wisdom. It is considered to be living capital which links to all other resources. It implies fertility and is the most important part of the ecology. Changes from the outside including biotechnology advancement, an aging society, health trends, and nature loving tourists are becoming opportunities to develop additional value for the production and service sectors, and they can also be areas to create more valuable innovations. International commitments and certain bilateral and multilateral free trade area agreements widely affect many things including environmental resource management, intellectual property, commerce and the production and service sectors. This makes it necessary to consider setting clear standpoints and strategies to conserve national resources, protect environmental security, and preserve community rights and local wisdom for the long-term welfare of the people. It has been found from the evaluation of national resources and environmental capital that the fertility of national resources and the environment, which are Thailand's advantages, are being affected by the development plans that mainly aim to support the country's economic growth. The situation results in neglectful overuse of resources. The expansion of economic sectors and the relocation of high-pollution industries resulting from free trade and investment, consumption behaviors, and materialism have increased pollution and waste. This affects the welfare of the people, causes natural resources and the environment to become unhealthy, and obstructs sustainable development (The Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan 2550-2554 BE)

**Community Tourism** Community Tourism is a new type of tourism which focuses on development, traditional and cultural conservation, and the preservations of natural resources and the environment. It is a type of tourism that emphasizes the role of local people in tourism management in tourist areas, which is why it is called community tourism. It is founded on the idea that local people are responsible for tourism resources, so the community ought to participate and by defining its role in in several areas including the development of tourism, the conservation and preservation of natural resources and sharing the benefits from tourism. Community tourism must cause no negative effects to the community and natural resources, both at the attractions and nearby areas. It has to ensure sustainability in both tourism resources and utilization of tourism. Local people should be thoroughly involved with the process of planning, conduct, and evaluation of community tourism. Community tourism must also generate and distribute income to the members of the community. Therefore, it needs to give not only memorable recreation experiences to tourists but also increase the consciousness of tourists about the impact to the community and environment. Tourists will be able to acknowledge and understand the reason why the community has to be in charge of tourism activities that are conducted in the area.

**The Development and Management of Community Tourism** The community in the area must be responsible for tourism management, environmental preservation, merchandise distribution, and service provisioning. Therefore, the participation of people in the community is essential in the areas of readiness of tourism resources, people's interest, and interaction with tourism management. Participation can be done with direct or indirect interest, community or group interest, or as a joint venture with another organization. The following are the composition of community tourism management: (Saksiri Nantasuk, 2006)

1. **Community readiness** Community readiness includes availability of tourism resources related to ecosystem, a community organization, and whether its members are willing to take part in the development and share the benefit fairly.
2. **Roles and relation** The community in the area has an opportunity to merchandise their products and services to tourists. The community needs to have a good management system for the preservation of the environment and conditions to establish relationships and understanding with the outsiders. Its local

administrative organization is responsible for environmental preservation and the development of its potential to promote the community tourism.

3. **Participation of the community at all levels** The community benefits directly from the provision of tourist activities and services. It can cooperate with other organizations in tourism management and investment.

4. **Community and its sustainable tourism development** This is to increase employment and distribute income to the community by developing the quality of tourist sites, promoting tourist activities according to local traditions and resources, improving the quality of services and tourist safety, encouraging the community participation in tourism management, supporting local products, and establishing cautiousness, knowledge and understanding.

The Nang Phaya sub-district is located 31 kilometers away from Thapla District Office. It is a community that survives the flooding effect from the building of Sirikit Dam. Eighty percent of the area is mountainous and twenty percent is highland where the people live. Phu Phaya Pho Mountain is the highest spot of Nang Phaya with a height of 1,350 meters above sea level. It is also the boundary that borders Uttaradit Province and Phrae Province. There is a scenic point where one can see views of mountains, forest, and the reservoir. The area is surrounded by natural forest which is the water source of Sirikit Dam. It is composed of dry dipterocarp forest, evergreen forest, and mixed forest with national economic plants and plenty of wildlife. There are trekking routes to Natong and Namman, and also various tourist activities and attractions such as waterfalls, Sirikit Dam, fishing, rafting, natural study, and sightseeing. Tourists come here for recreation all year round. There are also agro-forestry fruit orchards which depend on the well-being of the environment. They are integrated fruit orchards where durians, lansiums, mangosteens, rambutans, and other fruits are grown together. People also grow local economic plants such as coffee and mullilam. Its agriculture produces output year round. For art and culture, there is the Wat Namphra Temple which is more than 200 years old. Nang Phaya is a Lanna community where people continue Lanna culture, tradition, and wisdom and speak Lanna and Lan Chang dialects.

There are already tourist activities in Nang Phaya but they are private activities made by visitors. Nang Phraya Sub-district is a community with rich biodiversity and unique culture and wisdom that can grow along with tourism with effective planning on resource management and development. This is a great opportunity for the community to create additional value for the productions and service sectors in Nang Phaya. Tourism will significantly affect vast areas of the community so there is a need to consider the conditions and changes that could possibly occur. Plans and strategies for tourism development based on tourism biodiversity should be created and implemented explicitly and appropriately to avoid any harm to the resources so that it could not become detrimental to the community.

### **III. Research Methodology**

Strategies for community tourism based on biodiversity in Nang Phaya Sub-District have been carried out by studying tourism biodiversity and patterns of tourism activities in the community. The data collection process was conducted from January 2016 to December 2016 using in-depth interviews and group discussions with community representatives, academics, local leaders, sages, administrative officials in Nang Phaya Sub-district, and private sectors and governmental officials whose work is related to tourism in Uttaradit Province. Tourism entrepreneurs also gave suggestions to develop community tourism and tourism activities in Nang Phaya at the civil society forum to establish strategies for community tourism based on biodiversity.

For the population and sampling procedures, the area of the study includes the population of Thapla Sub-district. This population consists of 2,592 people: 1,343 males and 1,249 females. The population has been divided into 2 groups. The first group consists of 50 representatives from different areas such as local group leaders, administrative leaders, career group leaders, and youth leaders. The other group consists of 50 tourism information providers who are academics, tourist business entrepreneurs, and governmental and private staff who are responsible for tourism in Uttaradit. They are people that provide advice and suggestions to tourism businesses and activities in Nang Phaya.

### **IV. Research Results**

The community of Nang Phaya Sub-district is rich in tourism biodiversity which can be categorized into 5 areas: 1) environment, 2) culture and tradition, 3) ways of life and wisdom, 4) local foods, and 5) medicine and cures. It is a community with unique cultures and wisdom. All of the mentioned areas can be used

to develop tourism in the area and attract tourists. The principle of sustainable tourism by Shirley Eber has been applied to the condition of the community as follows:

**1. Use resources sustainably** There needs to be measures to manage actual resources, both environmental and cultural, to make use of them efficiently and effectively by considering their natural and cultural quality and their contribution to the wisdom of the community. The preservation of tourism resources means to preserve their quality. The community of Nang Phaya Sub-district is rich in tourism biodiversity which can be categorized into 5 aspects: 1) environmental aspect, 2) cultural and traditional aspect, ways of lives and wisdom aspect, 4) local foods aspect, and 5) medicinal and cures aspect. It is a community with unique cultures and wisdoms. All of the mentioned aspects can be used to develop tourism in the area and attract tourists. The principles of resource management are to use the resources for worthwhile purposes, to improve and maintain their sustainability and to enhance and develop the resource to be sufficient for the living. The improvement and maintenance made to the resources should cause the least possible amount of negative effects. An appropriate combination of local wisdom and modern technology will prolong the tourism business.

**2. Maintain and support diversity of nature, society, and culture** This is needed to expand the foundation of tourism by maintaining and supporting diversity in the tourism area, including existing natural and cultural tourist attractions. It can be conducted by improving the value and service standard to make tourists spend more time and increase repetitive tourism.

**3. Integrate tourism into planning** Related sectors have to coordinate in the development and planning of tourism development and the local, provincial, and regional level. This includes planning at higher levels such as the ministry, and at the tourist area itself.

**4. Support local economy** The tourist area has to coordinate with local administration organization, governmental sectors, and private sectors related to tourism promotion. Public relations in distinctive resources must be promoted for to increase tourist visits and increase income for local entrepreneurs.

**5. Involve local communities** Cooperation by participation with local organizations as-a-whole is important. There should be participation in events held by other organizations as a cooperator such as in activities for public interests, as a co-analyst, and cooperation in tourism promotion. There is also a need to coordinate local and organizational networks to improve the quality of local tourism management.

**6. Consult stakeholders and the public** The community, local administrative organizations, entrepreneurs, academic institutes, religious institutes, and responsible governmental sectors should cooperate and meet regularly to improve the potential of tourism, evaluate its impact, and resolve environmental and marketing problems together. This helps reduce conflicts of interests and establishes harmony among the stakeholders.

Strategies to develop community tourism plans based on biodiversity can be divided into four types: the strategy on tourism and environment resource management, the strategy on participation of local people, the strategy on tourist services and infrastructure provisions, and the strategy of marketing promotion and tour guide services. These strategies will bring significant opportunities to the community to deploy its richness in tourism biodiversity as an essential material and a foundation of additional value in production and service sectors. The outcome of the implementation of the strategies will impact many things including resource and environment management, service and production sectors, and the preservation of wisdom, culture and traditions of community. Nang Phraya Sub-district has the advantage of natural resources, an environment with biodiversity, local wisdom and culture , which give it a substantial foundation for the development and life of the local people and their society.

**The strategy on Tourism and Environmental Resource Management** The community of Nang Phaya is surrounded by nature and an environment of mountainous geography with a cool climate. The community needs strategies and measures to preserve the richness of natural and environmental resources, and the production process for tourism depends on the sustainable use of natural resources. This can be done in

many ways such as the establishment of an environmental preservation network, the development of a body of knowledge in the management, preservation, and restoration of natural and environmental resources, and a campaign to raise consciousness and awareness of natural and environmental resource preservation and conservation. This would allow for the preservation, conservation restoration and administration of the resources in the ecological system. Tourism resources also have to be administered to prevent and reduce pollution. The community, including the entrepreneurs, tourists, institutions, civil organizations, and local people need to cooperate in the preservation and conservation of natural and environmental resources. They must prevent the natural and environmental resources from being damaged or destroyed. Traditional beliefs and rituals, local wisdom, and traditions can be used as tourism resources and should be conserved and preserved.

**The Strategy on Participation of the People of the Community** As of now, people in Nang Phaya have not joined together as a group to take care of and manage tourism there. There should be the promotion of community participation especially in the process of coming up with creative ideas and in-group decision making in the development process. Local people can discover their potential in finding the resolution to the problem on their own for the sake of themselves and their community, which would answer their questions to the decentralized development. The future of development will focus on strengthening each community so that it can be self-reliant with a stable community economy, which would lead to and raise the level of income and quality of life. Local people should be encouraged to participate more in the processes of community tourism supervision and control, so they can live their lives with dignity. The community should also be encouraged to play its role as a middleman or coordinator between the community and other governmental organization and between the community and private sectors related to tourism in order to accomplish various tasks. These tasks could include the establishment of different selling points which include accommodations, homestays, restaurants, tour guide, trekking activities, and community museum. In addition, there should be training sessions provided to local people for their understanding of basic principle, needs, means, and benefits of the development of community tourism. Young people ought to become a part of the development to foster consciousness and awareness in them, to secure their participation, and to train them with skills and expertise as they play an integral role in the future development of the community.

**The Strategy on Tourist service and Provision of Infrastructures in the Community** The landscape of the community has to be beautiful and neat. There should be signs that tell the story, background, and history of the community for a better understanding to visitors. The signs include those that give directions and descriptions of tourist attractions and landmarks that show the identity of the community. This would remind visitors of the importance of natural and social environment preservation and conservation. The development of infrastructure must not affect tourism resources and the biodiversity. Infrastructure such as attractions or for trekking, homestay services, food services, and recreation activities should be assimilated into the environment.

**The Strategy of Marketing Promotion and Tour Guide Service in the Community** The community should set up a group in order to conduct public relations and marketing with community's target groups. Marketing should be studied and linked with travel agencies, hotels, accommodations, and visit groups. Local products should be developed and upgraded to become community souvenirs. The tourism capacity has to be balanced with the number of tourists, since community tourist attractions and biodiversity are so sensitive that they can be affected with overpopulated tourists. The community should emphasize the quality of tourism, not the quantity of tourists. Tour guide services should be provided to give tourists knowledge and information and supervise tourists' behaviors and activities to ensure they are in accordance with the framework of community tourism.

## **V. Conclusion and Discussion**

The community of Nang Phaya Sub-district is an area with tourism potential and fertile biodiversity which can be leveraged according to the principle of sustainable tourism. There are four strategies to develop community tourism plan in Nang Phaya based on its biodiversity: the strategy of tourism and environment resource management, the strategy of participation of local people, the strategy of tourist services and the provisioning of infrastructure, and the strategy of marketing promotion and tour guide services. These strategies



can be used in the community of Nang Phaya Sub-district which is an area with high biodiversity of nature, environment, art and culture, tradition, and wisdom. Community tourism will sustainably develop and benefit local people and visitors when it is founded on the involvement of all stakeholders, including the local people and others who benefit from the use of area and tourism of the community. More importantly, local people need take part in determining how community tourism will be developed via the systematic planning and development of strategies such as the defining tourism capacity, attending trainings made for local people, and participating in community tourism marketing.

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