Local Knowledge Characteristics of the Bajau Ubian Community as a Tourist Attraction in Mantanani Island, Kota Belud, Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract: The paper discusses characteristics of the local knowledge of the Bajau Ubian community from the perspective of how such knowledge inherited from skilled persons in the past can be turned into tourist attractions in Mantanani Island. The theory of authenticity is used to explain the importance of representations of authenticity of a past or different culture. This study employs a qualitative approach through detailed interviews and observations in the study area. Six informants were interviewed in-depth in order to examine the characteristics of each aspect of local knowledge that has the potential to be a community-based tourism product. The study found that almost all the local knowledge was transferred from one generation to the next. Apart from this, the basic materials for the processing of selected local knowledge categories are derived from two sources namely the island and marine life. In terms of sustainability, the study found that these aspects of perlu dilocal knowledge were less studied or practiced by the younger generation resulting in some elements becoming extinct. The majority of the young generation from the island are migrating to cities such as Kota Kinabalu and Kota Belud to seek jobs. Lastly, the study suggests that, in order to preserve and conserve the local knowledge, it would be a viable strategy to promote it as a community-based tourism product in Mantanani Island, Kota Belud, Sabah.

Key words: Local Knowledge • Tourism Island • Perspective • Skilled Operators

INTRODUCTION

According to The Responsible Ecological Social Tours Project concept of community-based tourism is "managed and owned by the community" [1]. The government is concerned and committed to the development of rural communities. Community-based tourism such as the homestay can be a potential source of economic growth in rural communities. However, without the active participation of the community, attempts to change the lives of the people for the better through the implementation of community-based tourism will be difficult. This form of tourism requires the direct involvement of the community, especially in decision-making while profits from visits by tourist are divided equally [2-4].

Local knowledge is a form of continuity of knowledge of a particular race which originates from the ancestors and are then passed down from one group or individual to another [5]. According to World Tourism Organization concept of local knowledge refers to knowledge that is accumulated, complex in practice in terms of performance and are maintained and developed by individuals who have a long history of experience[2]. Accordingly, ethnic diversity and the existence of ethnic groups in Sabah such as Kadazan, Bajau, Dusun, Rungus and other tribes also make local knowledge in Sabah unique and rich in cultural diversity. As such the distinctive characteristics of local knowledge of the ethnic minorities have implications on the potential as a community-based tourism product.

Community-Based Tourism as an Economic Generator: Community-based tourism (CBT) is a form of tourism development that involves the local people, usually the rural poor and the micro economy. Consequently, the economic approach adopted in the community is to maximize the positive effects resulting from tourism in terms of job creation and redistribution of wealth.

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General studies of community-based tourism have been carried out extensively by many researchers in the field of tourism either within or outside the country [6-9]. The researchers concluded that community-based tourism can benefit local communities. These benefits include the development of the family economy through income generation thus helping to improve their lives. In other words, CBT emphasizes the active participation of local communities in an area as an effective strategy to strengthen community-based tourism [9].

Direct community involvement in various forms of tourism development projects can revitalize the economic, social and political aspects of the community. Direct community involvement, particularly as employers who provide accommodation to tourists is recognized as contributing to the development of tourism in the area. The tourism concept first emerged in the mid-1990s[10]. It encourages local communities to obtain the cooperation of both sides that is the tourists and the hosts, in tourism projects prepared by the community itself.

To make CBT stronger, systematic and successful, a number of critical factors should be taken into account [11]. This includes the accessibility of local operators, commercial product sustainability, public policy framework and the smooth execution of the program. These factors should be analyzed in detail so that a tourism development project remains competitive for a long time. Moreover, in a CBT program, environmental aspects play an important role towards the success of the tourism development project concerned. This is because most of the tourism development program that is based on community involvement is widely conducted in rural areas that are rich in natural resources. Nature-based activities such as enjoying the beautiful scenery, jungle trekking or boating with a cozy rustic atmosphere are important elements in CBT programs such as the homestay community in Malaysia.

**Background of the Theory of Authenticity (Authenticity Theory):** The study of local wisdom and CBT uses Authenticity Theory as its basis of theoretical research[12]. The theory explains the importance of authenticity as a representation of a past culture or other cultures[13]. Authenticity from another dimension refers to objects that are bought as souvenirs, clothes and food produced with traditional methods without using any modern machinery [12];

“...Authenticity is relevant to some kinds of tourism such as ethnic, history or culture tourism, which involve the representation of the other or of the past (Wang, 1999).”

The study applies this theory because community-based tourism emphasizes the community’s involvement as the host in planning and managing tourism development in order to create an industry that can be sustained for a long period [14]. To ensure that the industry is maintained, the commitment of all parties, including local residents is essential[12]. It is implemented through their role as employers and entrepreneurs who need to possess a commendable attitude and hospitality when interacting with tourists. Community-based tourism will only be successful if it gets undivided support from the population itself [15-17].

**Research Area:** Mantanani Island is an island located off the west coast of Sabah. The island has three islands, namely a crowbar, Big Mantanani and Small Mantanani. There are two villages on the island, namely Kampung Bukit and Kampung Padang Siring. This areal extent of the island is 3.5 km long and 0.7 km wide while it is separated from the mainland city of Belud by a distance of 35 km. The community of Mantanani is estimated at about 1,500 people, consisting of the Bajau Ubian. The natural beauty and unique local culture makes Mantanani an attractive holiday destination. The economic systems of the island’s communities are dependent on the three main occupations as fishermen, resort workers and as operators of small grocery stores. However, their standard of living is low as the issue of poverty is synonymous with the fishermen community.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study uses two methods, namely in-depth interviews and observations as well as researching various secondary references. The in-depth interview method is used to identify the characteristics of local wisdom or knowledge of the Ubian Bajau community. Questions asked during the interview are drawn from a pre-prepared guide listing the questions to be asked. However, this list only serves as a reference to the researchers during the interview. In addition, researchers also videotaped the interviews, recorded information and data as well as snapped photos of the interview sessions. Six selected respondents are chosen to represent the six
categories of local wisdom that have been identified as potential community-based tourism attractions on the island. The observation method is used to review and scrutinize each category of the particular local wisdom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To investigate how the characteristics of local wisdom or knowledge of skilled persons in the Bajau Ubian community can be tourist attractions, questions presented to the respondents included aspects related to the sources of local knowledge, sources of raw materials from which they are obtained and the sustainability of local wisdom and knowledge.

Demographic Profile of Respondents: A total of 6 respondents were interviewed to examine the characteristics of the local indigenous Bajau communities as community-based tourism attractions on Mantanani island. Respondents were selected according to their respective areas of expertise in selected local knowledge of the island (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondents 1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Fisherman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents 2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respondents 4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Resort Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents 5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents 6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources of Local Knowledge

Local knowledge is the knowledge and skills obtained from those who had lived there earlier and are mostly practiced by those who are older. In our society, local wisdom is often found in songs, proverbs and ancient scriptures as practiced in everyday behavior [18]. Based on the answers given by the respondents, knowledge of local wisdom of the Ubian Bajau community are acquired and inherited from the forefathers. According to one respondent:

Bang nia keraian bate magkahwin maka kapataian biasa na ni hinang ik kami maghea banaan aah kampung... bateh magballah takakan, jadi mindutu biasana... a’ah to’ah yang magballa bateh kuie atau banan lauk... kami a’ah muda ik ngandah nganad na bah... mindihi magtabang tabang ik menjadi kemestian mindeom kampung tu... jadi kami a’ah muda ik ngandah na min ka mato’ahhan... (Respondent 5, Housewife, 32 Year old)

Translation: If there is a celebration, marriage, or death, preparatory work is usually done by us in the village, such as cooking. Usually our young people will learn from the elderly people who make cakes or a wide variety of side dishes. During this ceremony, mutual assistance is mandatory among the villagers. In conclusion, our young people learn from the elderly.

It is supported by a friend who is a cousin of the respondent who said:

Aho’, baie mboh kami tuh mandu’ betingga ngahinang panyam, jah maka tahai...
(Respondent 6, Housewife, 30 Year old)

Translation: Yes, it is the first ancestors who teach us how to make panyam, cakes, jah and tahai.

In addition, interviews were conducted with a respondent who has just passed the age of maturity. The answer given is the same. When asked to give an opinion on the knowledge they have, he stated that almost all of them learnt from the wisdom of those who lived earlier, whether from friends, relatives or their own parents. According to this respondent:

Baie dahu nan meya kami magtuhun ma emmah kami, c bapa, maka saga sehe... jadi biasa na ah to’ah yang mandu’an kami magtuhun, magpassi, magtimbak daing maka mokot...
(Respondent 4, Resort Employee, 21 Year old)

Translation: In the past, our dive trips were with our father, uncles and friends, so usually it is the older ones (aged group) who taught us aspects regarding diving, fishing, blast fishing and trawling.

Skills such as making ships, boats and canoes are still practiced on the island of Mantanani. However, these skills are practiced only by the elderly. Most young people are not interested in pursuing these skills. Many have migrated to the city of Kota Kinabalu and Kota Belud to either continue their studies or work. According to one respondent:

Maghinang kappal tuh binasa, taggol maka subai tauh du sab ngahinang ia. Sogo kahekaan na kasubulan malahat tuh mbal bihali nganad... nia du sab kamatoaan tuh mbal mandu... arak anak sigaam nganad tongan mbal binsana maghengket kayu...
(Respondent 3, Carpenter, 54 Year old)
Translation: A long time is required to produce a vessel besides being it being tiring and requiring the skills to make it. However, most young people in the village are not very interested in studying this art. Yet among the elderly, there are some who do not intend to teach this science of shipbuilding to their children to enable the children to learn seriously from the experiences of their hard labor with timber.

Based on the answers given by the respondents, almost all local Bajau Ubai wisdom are gained from the forefathers and passed down from one generation to the next. However, as a result of significant changes in mentality there are limitations in the transmission of local wisdom and skills to the younger generations. In addition, some families do not teach or pass on this traditional knowledge to their children so that the difficulties of life in the past are not repeated during the lives of their children and the next generation.

Sources of Raw Materials Utilised: According to the six categories of local wisdom, there are some categories that require the use of raw materials before becoming a final product. Among them is the handicraft and carpentry category. In general, the raw materials are derived from two sources, that is, on the island and the sea.

Decorative items for the houses are usually obtained from the sea and the island. From the answers given by respondents, catches of shells, fish and other marine life are taken home and put up for sale or utilized for personal needs. Normally, the residues of shells, clams and corals will be processed as diamonds in the yard or in the house. In addition, clam shells or the residue that have been carved are sold to foreign tourists who are interested in buying them. According to one respondent:

Biasana miha kami duhu kayu ni ngah mareom talun ma pulau tuh... nia du sab kayu ballak pahagul patandan e’ tampeh ni ngah ik kami pagahinang kappal... bang mabal pun nihinang hag lumah, sogo’ bate mastik, tukul, kapa maka lansang ik... ni balli e’ kami matagan tanah besar...

(Respondent 3, Carpenter, 54 Year old)

Translation: Normally, we will find the timber in the forest on the island... there are also wood that drift to the island... so we will take it to be used in shipbuilding or as house pillars... but other equipment such glue sticks, hammers, axes and nails are purchased in Kota Belud.

Thus, generally, most of the respondents stated the same thing with regards to the supply of the raw materials they use. Almost all the raw materials used were obtained in the vicinity of Mantanani whether at sea or on the island.

Sustainability of Local Knowledge: Knowledge is a key principle in determining the attitudes and practices of local communities towards the issue of sustainability. The concept of sustainability encompasses various aspects of perception and understanding. Knowledge is a process of remembering and forcing the brain cells to work. Local knowledge is the human effort to use his wisdom to act and respond towards things, objects or events that occur in a certain area [18, 19].

The local wisdom of the Ubai Bajau community has the potential to serve as community-based tourism products. Based on the answers given by respondents during the meeting, a proposal was submitted by them. According to one respondent, “these traditional skills are maintained through informal education, not in everyday life. Perhaps through informal education, traditional skills can be transferred young people(Respondent 2, Teacher, 37 Year old).

Accordingly, when respondents were asked to give their opinions and suggestions on the conservation and
preservation of local wisdom, their responses were most encouraging. Many agreed that informal education through guidance and training imparted to their own children can help maintain their local wisdom. However, a few respondents were reluctant to disclose certain life skills knowledge, particularly aspects related to fishing, trawling and diving. This is because of the previous hardships they had undergone and their hope that such issues will not be experienced by the next generation; thus, they encouraged their children to study hard instead.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the wisdom of local Bajau communities Ubian potential as a tourist attraction on the island Mantanani can be understood through a study of the perspectives of selected skilled operators. There are six categories, namely culinary wisdom, life skills, traditional games, craft and woodworking, art, dances and music, ceremonies and celebrations. Each local wisdom that was identified, whether still being practiced or not, has the potential to serve as a tourist attraction on the island. However, institutional support in the early stages of the development of CBT is important in developing Mantanani Island. Several stakeholders are identified as catalysts for the implementation of community-based tourism in the island. Among them are the roles of travel agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government and the private sector. However, the main responsibility falls on the community itself as it serves as the heart of community-based tourism development. Therefore, awareness of the importance of local knowledge should be imbued within the community in general and among the youths, in particular. To ensure the sustainability of local wisdom in Mantanani, both formal and informal educational measures, resource management, organization of campaigns and programs related to awareness and preservation of local knowledge should be implemented in a systematic and intensive manner from time to time.

REFERENCES


