

ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF CUC PHUONG NATIONAL PARK IN VIETNAM

Bui Duc Sinh

Faculty of Business Administration, Banking University HCMC Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam

sinhbd@buh.edu.vn ORCID: 0009-0009-0141-8189

Abstract

The overall purpose of this study is to obtain an understanding of Cuc Phuong National Park residents' perceptions and satisfaction to ward ecotourism impacts as well as their attitudes for ecotourism development. In addition, this study also points out the main issues of current ecotourism strategies in Cuc Phuong National Park.

Method: Measurement of dispersion of the data using the standard deviation of the measurement. According to the framework, residents' perceptions of tourism impact as well as their satisfaction of tourism impacts and their attitude for additional tourism development are determined by their socio-demographic characteristics.

Results: The results showed that in general, people had perception about tourism impacts, especially, people in young age group, high income and education groups. However, there were amount of respondents who did not see the benefit of tourism and appeared unconcerned or ambivalent about tourism development contributing their living condition in many aspects of tourism impacts.

Conclusion: the authority of Cuc Phuong National Park must recognize the perception, satisfaction and attitudes of local resident toward tourism impact in unit and tourism development in general and then building ecotourism strategies based on ecotourism criteria and put the local community interests first or is so- called local community-centeredness.

Keywords: Ecotourism, economic impact, local income, national parks.

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1. INTRODUCTION

First of all, Community participation as described by Murphy (1985) is central to the alternative ecotourism concept, with advocates arguing that participation in planning is necessary to ensure that benefits reach residents in destination areas (Simmons, 1994). Cater (1995) and Wild (1994) suggest that ecotourism which encourages local employment and small business development promotes higher economic multipliers, and that a community approach to decision-making helps to ensure traditional

lifestyles and community values are respected. However, the participation of local communities is depended considerably on their perception and attitude toward ecotourism development, especially the benefits behind the ecotourism development (Bui, 2013). Therefore, the analysis of local residents' awareness and attitude is very necessary in assessing ecotourism activities especially when building an ecotourism development strategy in which local communities play vital role in the success of ecotourism strategy in the short and long term.

Policy is especially relevant to the ecotourism industry, because of what this 'type' of tourism is said to value (ethical approaches to management, local people, the protection of natural heritage, and so on). An absence of sound policy and planning, coupled with the fact that ecotourism is the fastest growing sector of the world's largest industry (upwards of 20% of the world travel market as ecotourism (Fennel, 2003; The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 1998), demonstrates an impending need for better industry organization. Unfortunately, ecotourism policy has only recently come about, as a consequence of insufficient consensus on what constitutes appropriate ecotourism development. The nature of the industry (strong advocates representing parks, the environment, NGOs, government, industry and local people) is one that demands an effective balance between development and conservation, supply and demand, benefits and costs and people and the environment.

The study by Fennel (2001) of over 60 regional tourism offices in North America found that most had not instituted ecotourism policies, despite the fact that there was overwhelming consensus on the value of policy to the industry. A significant factor constraining policy development for the industry is the lack of agreement on how to define the concept and identify a process in which to classify ecotourism products. The central aim of this study is to critically examine ecotourism (definitions, products and policies) through a variety of case studies from around the world. This approach provides an objective overview of the extent of global ecotourism policy. It demonstrates the need for further refinement of existing policy, and for the creation of new, dynamic policies geared towards the evolution of a successful ecotourism industry at the start of the new millennium.

2. METHODOLOGY

Variables and conceptual framework

Based on the literature review, the following variables are utilized to measure residents' perception of tourism impacts and their satisfaction toward and their attitude for additional tourism development in Cuc Phuong National Park: (1) Residents' socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, level of education, monthly household income; job status; size of family); (2) Residents' perceptions of economic impacts of tourism (perceive positive and negative impacts); (3) Residents' perceptions of socio-cultural

impacts of tourism (perceive positive and negative impacts); (4) Residents' perceptions of environmental impacts of tourism (perceive positive and negative impacts);

(5) Community satisfaction (public service, environment, economics, medical and recreation); (6) Attitude for additional tourism development. A description of the variables is discussed in the next chapter.

Conceptual framework

Based on the literature review that is discussed above, a conceptual framework for the study is depicted in Figure 2.

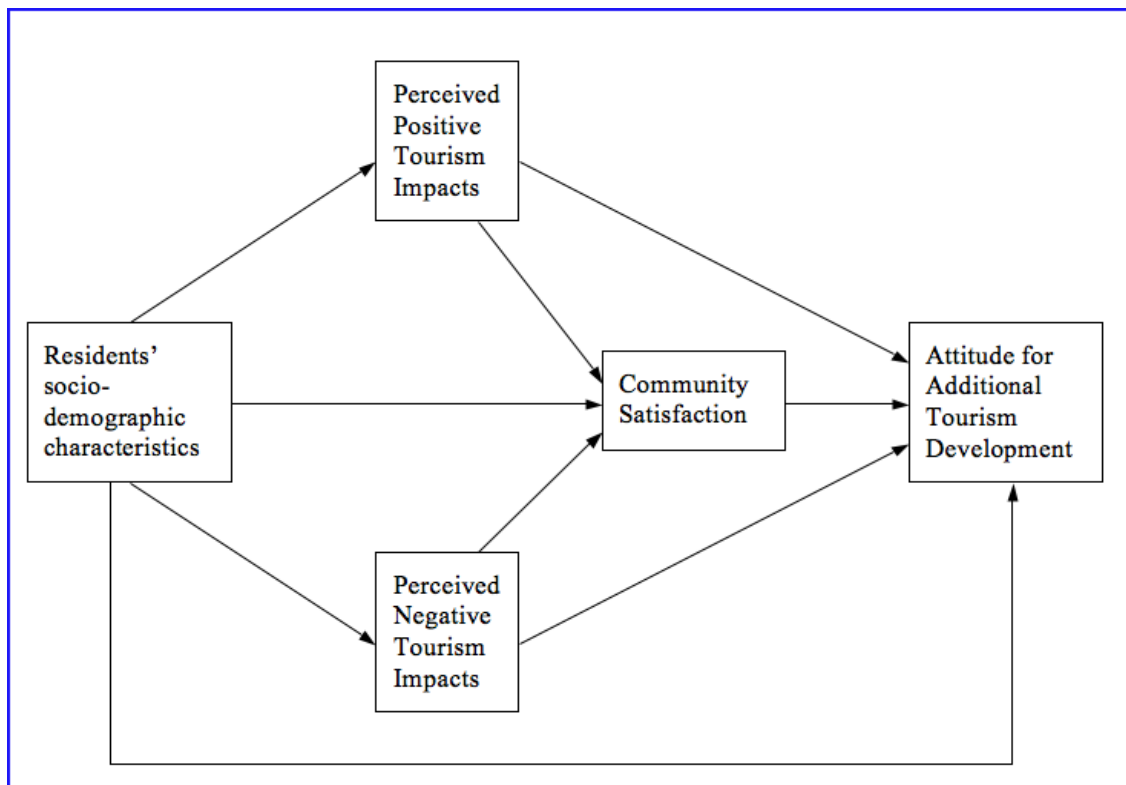


Figure 2. Conceptual framework of residents' perceived tourism impacts and attitudes toward tourism development

According to the framework, residents' perceptions of tourism impacts as well as their satisfaction of tourism impacts and their attitude for additional tourism development are determined by their socio-demographic characteristics. Residents' socio-demographic characteristics, residents' perceptions of tourism impacts and their satisfaction of tourism impacts determine their attitudes for additional tourism development.

Sample size

As the data of population size are not updated and so as the author observed that the actual population size of park population could be well far above of 2,200 residents (Cuc Phuong National Park, 2009), the author decided to get the representative sample size of 10%, or equal to about 220- 280 residents for the study area as a whole. A combination of systematic and stratified random sampling approaches is employed for the sample selection. A study sample of 280 households will draw from the resident household population of in 5 communes listed below (Figure 6). In the first step, the stratified random sampling was used. The population of Cuc Phuong National Park was first subdivided into sub-groups (communes). Systematic sampling was then performed through the selection of every second household at each commune.

For this study, the research made use of the following descriptive statistics:

- The calculation of frequencies and percentages expressed as tables.
- Measurement of central tendency, namely mean (or average value). The mean can be used for ordinal and interval data.
- Measurement of dispersion of the data using the standard deviation of the measurement.

3. MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 The perception, satisfaction of local people toward tourism impacts and their attitude for tourism development

With 44 perceptual statements in Table 3 about kinds of impact of tourism and their satisfaction about tourism development were divided into six sub-sections: positive economic impacts, negative economic impacts; positive socio-cultural impacts, negative socio-cultural impacts, positive environmental impacts, and negative environmental impacts. In addition, the respondents were also asked to evaluate their satisfactions toward tourism development in Cuc Phuong National Park, and to indicate their attitudes for additional tourism development in Cuc Phuong National Park.

From an overall perspective, the local people have a positive view toward tourism impact and they totally support tourism development. With the economics site, respondents understood the value of tourism throughout the changing of local economy through improving investment, developing infrastructure ($m=3.82$, shown in table 3) and the disadvantage from the tourism impacts as the raise of price in goods and services or cost of real estate ($m=3.50$, shown in table 3). Respondents also strongly agreed that tourism has positive socio-cultural impacts and positive environmental impacts. They especially felt that tourism has encouraged variety of cultural activities ($m=3.73$), increased demand for historical and cultural exhibits

($m=3.69$) and the image of community. Besides the positive views, they also admitted that increase of crime/robberies/vandalism ($m=3.76$) obviously cemented any economic development, especially with the mix of many cultures from tourism activities.

Environment has strong impacts to the living of the local people, they depicted that the increase of environmental pollution went up quite fast since tourism has largely opened ($m=4.36$), they also feel that their crops were affected by the local ecosystem changed ($m=3.77$), however, they accepted that public facilities, the environment and the view of their living place have been considerably improved ($m=3.57$). With the improvement of tourism, the local people have been quite satisfied, especially with public services as public transportation ($m=3.62$) and the social security ($m=3.65$), health system and quality of water resource have been highly evaluated by local people, they were quite satisfied with this changes through tourism development. However, they did not really satisfy with the improvement of local education system ($m=2.68$), with big family they are really worried about their kids with education as the first issue of concern.

Finally, the respondents were quite supportive for tourism development in Cuc Phuong National Park. They believed that their community should support tourism development and they are willing to be involved in the ecotourism development of Cuc Phuong National Park in the future as well as willing to welcome more tourists ($m=3.90$, $m=3.57$, and $m=3.83$, respectively).

Table 1. Perception, satisfaction about tourism impacts and attitude toward tourism development

<i>Items</i>	2	3	4	5	<i>m</i>	<i>SD</i>
	(%)					
<i>Positive economic impacts</i>						
Improves investment, development, infrastructure in the economy	8.2	14.1	65.2	12.5	3.82	.751
Increases employment opportunities	26.2	21.8	41.8	10.2	3.36	.980
Contributes to income and standard of living	44.2	21.5	31.6	2.7	2.93	1.13
Improves town's overall tax revenue	50.7	13.7	21.9	13.7	2.98	1.13
<i>Negative economic impacts</i>						
Increased real estate cost and property taxes	16.5	28.1	44.9	10.5	3.50	.890
Seasonal tourism created high-risk, under-or unemployment issues	65.6	22.6	5.5	6.3	2.52	.858
Increases price of goods and services	45.6	27.0	18.8	8.6	2.90	.991
<i>Positive socio-cultural impacts</i>						
Increases availability of recreational facilities and entertainment	67.5	17.2	14.1	1.2	2.49	.777
Improves understanding and image of communities/cultures	43.4	12.8	30.1	13.7	3.14	1.13
Increases demand for historical and cultural exhibits	9.4	20.3	61.7	8.6	3.69	.754
Encourages variety of cultural activities	18.8	21.1	46.1	23.0	3.73	1.02
<i>Negative socio-cultural impacts</i>						
Increases traffic accidents	22.7	22.3	37.5	17.5	3.50	1.03
Increases crime/robberies/vandalism	4.7	35.9	38.3	21.1	3.76	.838
Increases alcoholism, prostitution, and sexual permissiveness	17.6	19.9	56.6	5.9	3.51	.849
Increases gambling/illegal games	37.1	6.6	30.5	25.8	3.45	1.23
<i>Positive environmental impacts</i>						
Preserves environment and improves the appearance of your area	36.3	9.0	32.4	22.3	3.41	1.19
Improves living utilities infrastructure (water, electric, telephone)	48.8	18.7	18.0	14.5	2.98	1.12
Improves public facilities (pavement, traffic network, civic center)	39.1	11.3	36.3	13.3	3.24	1.11
<i>Negative environmental impacts</i>						
Damage natural environment and landscape	34.8	39.1	12.5	13.7	3.05	1.01
Destroy local ecosystem	9.8	13.7	66.3	10.2	3.77	.760
Increases environmental pollution (litter, water, air, and noise)	5.5	2.0	43.4	49.2	4.36	.775
<i>Public service satisfaction</i>						
Fire protection	32.2	22.7	23.8	20.3	3.31	1.14
Welfare and social services (public assistant)	34.4	36.7	7.4	21.5	3.16	1.12
Public transportation to and from other community	13.7	17.2	62.9	6.3	3.62	.798

Table 1. Perception, satisfaction about tourism impacts and attitude toward tourism development (continued)

<i>Items</i>	2	3	4	5	<i>m</i>	<i>SD</i>
	(%)					
Police protection	13.3	30.1	34.8	21.9	3.65	.966
Public health services	13.3	17.6	39.1	10.2	3.26	1.03
Public schools	57.4	27.0	5.9	9.8	2.68	.961
<i>Environment satisfaction</i>						
Environmental cleanliness (air, water, soil)	7.0	32.4	46.5	14.1	3.68	.802
Climate and weather	75.4	13.7	10.2	8.0	2.36	.695
General appearance of your region	57.0	27.3	13.3	2.3	2.61	.804
<i>Recreation opportunities satisfaction</i>						
Private/commercial recreation (health clubs, movies, etc.)	49.6	18.8	27.0	4.7	2.87	.969
Park and open space	41.0	28.5	21.1	9.4	2.99	1.00
Your leisure life	11.3	35.9	36.3	14.1	3.60	.944
<i>Economics satisfaction</i>						
Shopping facilities	53.7	16.8	18.0	10.5	2.79	.977
Cost of living	54.7	16.8	18.0	10.5	2.84	1.06
Housing (cost and availability)	56.3	33.2	8.2	2.3	2.57	.743
Utilities (water, gas, electricity, sewage)	43.8	28.5	15.6	11.7	2.95	1.03
Job opportunities	12.9	26.2	57.8	3.1	3.51	.757
<i>Medical services satisfaction</i>						
Hospital and medical facilities	9.0	31.3	38.7	21.1	3.72	.898
Medical doctors	32.0	29.3	28.1	10.5	3.17	.999
<i>Attitudes for tourism development</i>						
I want tourism will be improved much more	12.9	19.5	48.8	18.8	3.73	.912
I would like to be involved in tourism development	6.6	19.9	57.0	16.4	3.83	.777
The community should support for tourism development	19.9	18.8	45.3	16.0	3.57	.983
The local government should have clear tourism strategy	9.4	35.5	49.2	5.9	3.52	.746

Note: $n = 256$; 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree and no respondents expressed their strong disagreement (1).

3.2 Results from local resident interview

The researchers attempted to approach 25 potential respondents, but were able to complete 20 interviewees only (Table 2), spreading in seven villages with five communities, the rest of them either refused or gave incomplete interviews. Most households have large families, a typical ethnic minority family. The smallest was a five-member family and the largest has nine members. This is explained by the fact that ethnic minority families still cherish the extended family system. However, conservationists view the growing population of local people and their basic needs as a major threat to the conservation of the protected area.

The study also revealed that almost all households had their family members working in the tourism industry and some households had two or three family members work in tourism (Table 2). All people who work in the tourism industry are daughters or sons in the family, young labors who are pioneers in local community in doing tourism.

Table 2. Responses on the member of family numbers

No of Family Members	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
5	1	5
6	6	30
7	9	45
9	4	20
Total	20	100

Based on the finding, all of the works they do are very simple work (Table 3), like selling some local goods in souvenir shops, cleaning at small hotels, guest houses or restaurants and work as tourist guides but not really as “guides” just only like leading the way around the park.

Table 3. Responses of family members work in Tourism industry

Kinds of work	Number of households	Percentage (%)
Souvenir shops	4	24
Small hotels/ Guest houses	5	30
Restaurants	5	30
Tourist guides	3	16
Total	17	100

Ecotourism perception and attitudes in economic side

From the interview results, the biggest benefits the local residents get are infrastructure improvement and employment, which directly bring them benefit. Some local people who have family members working in ecotourism think they got a lot of benefits from ecotourism, especially at the peak seasons. However, they honestly admitted that they really do not know much about skills or background in doing ecotourism. This is a problem that the local government and NGOs also have to know and find ways to help local people overcome.

4. DISCUSSION

Ecotourism in national parks seemed to be one of the options in the conservation of the natural resources and to improve the living condition of local communities. However, ecotourism development will be useless if it lacks the perception and support of local communities and appropriate

ecotourism strategies. The aims of this study were to measure residents' perception and satisfaction towards ecotourism impacts and their attitudes for

ecotourism development in Cuc Phuong National Park; to assess the current ecotourism strategies based on ecotourism criteria and then to provide recommendations on ecotourism development strategies. The primary data were collected through personal observations, in-depth interviews with residents and national park staffs, and from surveys on households in all of the five communes in the Cuc Phuong National Park. The survey was conducted from December 2012 to May 2013. The results depicted that local communities were aware of ecotourism impacts and had positive attitudes toward ecotourism development, and were satisfied of ecotourism development. However, higher perception rate was found on specific groups such as the young, the high income and educated, and those with jobs related to ecotourism. The study revealed the issues of concerns about the current ecotourism development strategies in Cuc Phuong National Park. The major hindrances for ecotourism development were lack of local participation and unattractive ecotourism services. It was also suggested that Cuc Phuong National Park should use ecotourism criteria to implement ecotourism activities sustainably and to harmonize the sharing of benefits amongst the stakeholders. The approaches proposed were to: create local employment through reengineering, improve the ecotourism quality, appropriate tourism benefits to the stakeholders, and carry out education and training programs. Furthermore, the results of the study helped tour operators and tourism promoters aware the real concerns, issues on current ecotourism activities in Cuc Phuong National Park.

5. CONCLUSION

To improve the living condition of the local resident and conservation of the natural resource activity in the minority areas, ecotourism is considered the best way for this mission, that can be implemented in sustainable way and not consuming too much resource. However, to conduct this mission, the authority of Cuc Phuong National Park must recognize the perception, satisfaction and attitudes of local resident toward tourism impact in unit and tourism development in general and then building ecotourism strategies based on ecotourism criteria and put the local community interests first or is so-called local community-centeredness. To evaluate the perception, satisfaction and attitude of local people toward tourism impacts, a survey was conducted in five communities in and around Cuc Phuong National Park.

The results showed that in general, people had perception about tourism impacts, especially, people in young age group, high income and education groups. However, there were amount of respondents who did not see the benefit of tourism and appeared unconcerned or ambivalent about tourism development contributing their living condition in many aspects of tourism impacts. Besides that, with the time consumption in doing research in Cuc Phuong National Park, the author recognized that the current ecotourism strategy here is not really suitable and reasonable with the practical circumstances. Therefore, based on the study results and ecotourism criteria, ecotourism strategies were proposed such as re-organizing human resource to attract local labors, improving the quality of tourism products and services as well as conservation activities through the satisfactory and suitable distribution of tourism benefits and also carrying out some of education and training programs focusing much more on local community. Through the dividing local residents into groups and trying to attract and convince them to take part in tourism development, it will help the current ecotourism increase the quality of products and services, enhance the conservational activity by assigning more power and responsibility to the local people through groups, and especially it can share the benefits of tourism development activity for the local community equally, reasonably, clearly and explicitly, which helps the residents ameliorate living standards as well as be aware of the value of ecotourism development realistically and efficiently. It was also suggested that Cuc Phuong National Park should use ecotourism criteria to implement ecotourism activities in a sustainable way and special consideration should be provided to harmonize the sharing of benefits amongst the stakeholders. Once stakeholders get the awareness of the benefits from tourism activities, they will definitely approve of tourism activities and then always express their perception on protecting the natural resources. This can be regarded as the final aim for ecotourism development.

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