

## **Abstract**

### **A Study of Stakeholder Collaboration and Locally-Based Tourism Development: Case Studies of Rural Communities, Thailand**

Locally-based tourism (LBT) is introduced as a viable tool for the sustainable development of tourist destination communities. Despite having multiple definitions, LBT has well defined characteristics: small-scale, gradual growth tourism with a high degree of community participation in its development process. The underlying principle of LBT is that the distribution of socio-economic benefits among local community residents directly varies with the degree of community participation in tourism development. In developing countries, however, a number of challenges remain in implementing the principles of LBT, including factors which limit local participation in LBT development processes and a lack of capabilities to develop tourism successfully at the local community level.

In this research, inter-organizational collaboration is examined to determine how to increase the degree of community participation and the distribution of socio-economic benefits among local people. The objectives of this research are fourfold: (1) to examine the process of stakeholder collaboration in the development of LBT; (2) to identify the degree of community participation in policy-making processes and the sharing of economic benefits from the collaborative LBT development; (3) to identify the mechanisms which facilitate the collaboration; and (4) to evaluate the contributions of the collaborative LBT project to the sustainable development in the community. The case study approach is chosen as a research methodology. Three LBT projects in rural communities in Thailand are chosen as case studies. The data collection tools include key participant interviews, a questionnaire survey and observation.

The major findings are as follows. First, the process of stakeholder collaboration in a LBT project is divided into three stages: (1) problem-setting stage; (2) planning stage; and (3) implementation stage. Second, collaboration between the core and participant organizations contributes to the level of community participation in the LBT project by: (1) the involvement of community residents as the key stakeholders and the offering of capability building programs from the problem-setting stage increased the degree of community participation in the policy-making process; and (2) the pooling of resources of the participant stakeholders contributed to the successful development of tourism supply. However,

these steps do not guarantee a high degree of community participation in benefit sharing unless the tourism activities are diversified and well-integrated into the local economy and community residents have been empowered to participate in tourism-related activities. Third, the mechanisms which promote collaboration in an LBT project are: (1) a core organization; (2) capability building programs; (3) a good communication infrastructure; and (4) third party mediators. Fourth, collaborative LBT leads to sustainable development which results in: (1) broad-based distribution of economic benefits to community residents; (2) the conservation of tourism resources; (3) improvement of the quality of life; and (4) the building of local capabilities for tourism management, only if it remains small-scale, with gradual growth and a high degree of community participation in the policy-making process and benefit sharing. However, in order to ensure these desirable conditions will endure over time, top-down interventions may be necessary in certain areas, such as the development and enforcement of environmental codes, in addition to the systematic empowerment of organizations at the local level.