Establishing a Community Engagement Framework for Sustainable Tourism: the Case of Taiping Heritage Town Malaysia

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ABSTRACT
Adapting the concept of sustainability in heritage tourism is a new phenomenon in Malaysia. Taiping is one of the heritage towns in Malaysia that rich in historical heritage buildings. Regrettably, most of the heritage buildings have been demolished or abandoned due to the pressure from surrounding development. The proclamation of Taiping as a heritage town is not fully supported, particularly from the private heritage building owners. Some of the strict guidelines to be complied by the owners were argued to give negative impacts on adding value to their properties. Consequently, the buildings were dilapidated abandoned by the owners in order to generate higher profits through economic activities carried out in the new economic growth area. To respond to this problem, this study aimed to establish a preliminary framework of community engagement for conserving and preserving heritage buildings in Taiping. This research was accomplished by reviewing and drawing conclusion from the literature. Content analysis was used to examine relevant theories to identify factors influencing local community supports for sustainable tourism. The finding is very useful to provide a starting point for formulating a guideline of community engagement for enhancing local community supports towards conserving and preserving heritage buildings in Taiping.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainability had gained global political recognition since it was introduced by the Brundtland Report, titled ‘Our Common Future’ in 1987 at the United Nation Conference on Environment and Development [1]. From this moment on, the sustainability concept has formed a foundation of most developments and socio-economic activities in the built and natural environments including in the development of tourism industry [2]. Sustainable tourism has drawn interests among researchers, practitioners, governments and the other stakeholders due to the dynamics and emergence of increased knowledge as well as the attention drawn by the effect of environmental issues and extraordinary growth in tourism [3].

Adaption of sustainability concept enables a heritage tourism destination to meet the needs of tourists, providing an opportunity to promote economic growth, protect the physical condition, improve the quality of life of local residents and could lead to universal prosperity without environmental degradation [4]. Sustainable tourism is a condition of tourism based on the principles of sustainable development, taking ‘full account’ of its current and future economic, social and environmental impact [5: 11-12] and addressing the needs of stakeholders [4]. Conservation and preservation of heritage buildings are among the process to sustaining a tourism destination. According to the International Council on Monuments and Site [ICOMOS], conservation is a process which leads to the prolongation of life of cultural property and for its utilization now and in the future [6]. It is a process that seeks to promote the harmony of both private and community lives in the affected areas. It also referring to the encouragement of the preservation of those cultural properties that constitutes the memory of mankind. Apart from the other factors, sustainable heritage tourism needs support and involvement from local communities for ensuring its success.

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Adapting the concept of sustainability in heritage tourism is a new phenomenon in Malaysia. Conservation initiative in Malaysia only began to receive the government attention during the 1970’s. This was culminated by a drafted Bill of Antiquity which was later passed in the Parliament as Antiquity Act [Act 168] in 1976 and several related Acts and guidelines that followed. However, these provision of Acts and guidelines only being enforced within certain areas of archaeological importance and distinguished buildings of historical settlements in Malaysia. There are still uphill challenges faced by many agencies involved in conservation works to ensure their success. Malaysia has many settlements of historic, heritage buildings and cultural significance that are worthy of preservation for sustainable tourism. Malaysia is a country rich in cities and old buildings that have potential to be a tourist destination of world heritage, such as Georgetown, Malacca and Lenggong Valley. Taiping is one of the popular heritage towns in Malaysia. Taiping’s British Colonial legacy is not only form the town’s urban historic buildings but also relents a sense of place to the town. The town has been gazetted as the first heritage city in Perak that rich in historical heritages [7].

Taiping Municipal Council [MPT] as the local authorities of Taiping has introduced a 12 years planning program to preserve the tourism area of the city, known as ‘Rancangan Kawasan Khas [RKK] Kawasan Warisan Bandar Taiping’ [Special Area Plan, Taiping Heritage Town Area.] The RKK has been outlined to be fully achieved in the year of 2020. Many project plans have been developed to achieve the targets outlined in the RKK, one of the plans is known as ‘Heritage Buildings Preservation Project’. The Government has allocated around RM52 million to ensure the project achieves its target [7]. Among the key strategies being implemented to ensure the success of this project is to encourage local community engagement, particularly by undertaking development in collaboration with the owners of the gazette heritage buildings in Taiping. However, the proclamation of Taiping as a heritage town does not get full support from the owners of the private heritage buildings. Thus, a study to formulate a guideline of community engagement for enhancing local community supports towards conserving and preserving heritage buildings in Taiping is very crucial to sustain the heritage town.

2.0 Local Community Engagement for Preserving and Conserving Heritage Buildings in Taiping:

Taiping Local Authority is very ambitious to ensure that Taiping Heritage Town can be continuously enjoyed, sustained and maintained, encompassing both its natural and cultural heritage. RKK Taiping Heritage Area has outlined its vision, which is ‘to develop Taiping as a sustainable heritage town with sustainable governance to be fully realized in 2020. A total of 83 private heritage buildings have been gazetted as heritage buildings of Taiping to be redeveloped by heritage building preservation method. Three [3] types of incentives have been given to the owners of heritage buildings when they involved in the heritage building preservation project. The incentives are as follows [7]:

1. Reduction of taxes for the building owners and paint subsidy provision from the Heritage Department or private agency [paint manufacturer] to engage on the heritage building. In return, the paint manufacturers are given several free advertising space.
2. Incentives in terms of exclusion of processing fees of applications for planning permission and speed up the planning approval process.
3. Through the ‘adaptive re-use building’ method, the heritage buildings’ owners are allowed to change the use of the building to be more economical, while keeping the buildings with the characteristics of Taiping Heritage Town and maintaining the building’s facade.

However, there are several cost to be paid by the owners of the heritage buildings such as to comply the development control guidelines that require the building to be preserved with its original condition. Control actions and requirements of heritage building preservation by road in Taiping as formulated in Larut Matang Local Plan 2015 Report explained that heritage buildings are not allowed to be demolished or renovated. While the height of the buildings, should be according to the original height. Most of the private heritage buildings are with a height of not more than two floors [8].

Most building owners claimed that the implementation of the guidelines has prevented them from adding value to the properties [9]. The other issues such as maintenance costs, safety and soundness of the old buildings and business competitiveness to the surrounding new economic growth areas are also considered as the costs to be incurred by the heritage building owners. These strict requirements and guidelines have led them to object to the claim. Consequently, the buildings were dilapidated abandoned by the owners in order to generate higher profits through economic activities carried out in the new economic growth area.

Recognizing the importance of community engagement to achieve sustainability, especially to a heritage town which is closely related to the tourism sector, MPT has introduced community engagement approach to implement the RKK efficiently. They believe that preservation of heritage buildings in Taiping can be successfully implemented with the full support of and collaboration with the local community, especially the owners of the heritage buildings. There are four [4] stages of community engagement have been carried out by the MPT [7] as follows:
Stage 1: Basic Planning:
- To establish a steering group which comprises all levels of the community who are interested to involve.
- To provide a number of forums for people to present their views and feedback.

Stage 2: Management and Evaluation:
- To formulate several strategies and development programs by considering public opinion.
- To evaluate and interpret public opinion on development plans.
- To manage the allocation of funding and sponsorship.
- To identify priority of the project implementation phases [short term or long term].
- To revise all processes for controlling and regulating.

Stage 3: Monitoring:
- To ensure every project runs smoothly according to the allocation, time and proposed strategy.
- To promote the heritage town to the media such as through campaigns and organizing festivals in order to attract visitors.

Stage 4: Recognition:
- To provide incentives and awards to the residents’ representatives as well as to the individuals who involved in the projects.

The main question is whether the community engagement strategy being implemented in Taiping are efficient to reach the goal of the project?, and whether the perceived costs incurred and the benefits obtained from the project are significant to achieve optimum involvement of the community towards the success of the heritage building preservation goal?. These questions need to be answered in the future research to assess the effectiveness of the current heritage building preservation strategy in Taiping and to propose strategies that should be implemented to encourage their involvement towards achieving sustainability goals of Taiping.

3.0 Local Community Support Theories:
In addressing the aim of this study, the authors review theories underpinning support for sustainable tourism development from local community perspective to guide the formulation of community engagement framework for conserving and preserving heritage buildings in Taiping. Among these are relationship-based theories [stakeholder theory, social exchange theory, network theory and game theory]; resource based-theories [strategic management theory]; and politics-based theories [power-relations theory] [10, 11].

3.1 Stakeholder Theory [ST]:
One of the key success of sustainable tourism development implementation in a community is the support of stakeholders [11]. A stakeholder is defined as ‘any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organisation’s objectives’ [12:6]. ST is important in sustainable heritage tourism development in order to identify the individuals or groups that are likely to affect or be affected by tourism related activities. Stakeholder theory has been used in tourism studies in relation to community perceptions towards impacts and development strategies and residents’ perception and attitudes toward tourism development [13]. Therefore, community attachment and quality of life are supporting factors for sustainable tourism development in a local community. Residents’ occupational identity has tendency for a local community to oppose sustainable tourism development because as a stakeholder any tourism related activities that will replace their well-known occupation might not be supported. In a nutshell, these aforementioned factors are linked to the stakeholder theory in terms of those who can affect or is affected either in a positive or negative perspectives. Tourism development decisions are mostly made from the top down, where ‘expert’ make decisions and often decisions made are not reflective of community interest and opinions. Byrd, [2007] concludes that the first step to sustainable tourism development in a community is the identification of stakeholders and include them in the tourism development process. It does not means that all stakeholders need to be involved equally in the decision making process, but it does require that all interest are identified and understood [11].

3.2 Social Exchange Theory [SET]:
Various researchers within the tourism literature have used the social exchange theory [SET] as their theoretical base when studying perceptions towards tourism and its impacts on communities [14]. SET offers a theoretical base for understanding local community’s attitudes towards tourism [14, 15, 16]. SET has been found to be the most accepted in explaining perceptions and attitudes toward the tourism industry [17]. Social exchanges are “any voluntary activity between two organisations which have consequences, actual or anticipated, for the realisation of their respective goals” [18: 558]. Based on the SET, if the local community perceive that the benefit is assured without incurring more costs, then the local community are likely to be
involved in tourism and activities that will lead to its sustainability [19] and tends to oppose its development if the local community perceive the costs will be more than the benefits [15, 20].

3.3 Network Theory [NT]:
Mitchell [1973] developed a sociological study of networks [21]. The network theory examines the complexity of relationships between entities – such as individuals, groups and organizations – interacting in a social space or environment. The first most important step in applying NT is to identify stakeholders [22] so that can be involved in the development of sustainable tourism. Network theory is increasingly being applied in tourism destination studies [23, 24]. The NT is relevant in understanding the local community’s support for sustainable tourism development. This is because many of the tourism destination’s natural assets, such as parks, rivers, beaches, recreational forest and resorts appear to be jointly owned [25]. Therefore, community involvement as a supporting factor for sustainable tourism development in heritage tourism destination tends to be rooted and connected with the network theory. Additionally, this theory is also relevant in understanding the sense of community. This is because it deals with the quality of relationship among members of the community or organizations that make it possible for them to relates and work in harmonious and sustainable way [10]. As a result of the existing collaboration, the local community might support the sustainable heritage tourism due to their perceptions that the development will be beneficial to them.

3.4 Game Theory [GT]:
GT is one of the relationship-based theories that have been applied in destination collaboration [25]. GT is driven by an acknowledgement and acceptance of mutual dependency, understanding and the necessity for reciprocity in the pursuit of shared interests of parties involved [25]. The main goal of GT is to gain a better understanding of human [tourist and local residents]; and organizational behavior – Destination Marketing Organisations [DMOs], government [tourism boards] at both local, state and federal levels, Non-government Organisations [NGOs], and tourism entrepreneurs/businesses [26, 27]. GT is concerned with strategic decision-making of two or more individuals or organizations interacting in a context with interdependent “payoffs” [28]. GT is relevant in the understanding the local community’s participation in decision-making process in sustainable tourism development-related activities [19]. The support of local community for sustainable tourism development can be enhanced if they are involved or participate in decision-making process [29] of sustainable tourism development as the host community [10].

3.5 Strategic Management Theory [SMT]:
SMT sets out to explain the means by which organizations attempt to minimize the external threats confronting them and capitalize upon external opportunities through collaboration with others [30]. SMT is concerned with the management processes and decisions that determine the long-term structure and activities of the organization. For tourism destinations, destination strategic choices may include the selection of a destination vision, form of governance to define and coordinate activity. Based on SMT any form of tourism related activities may be viewed as external threats to the status quo of the local community in terms of means of livelihood [10].

3.6 Power-Relations Theory [PRT]:
Power-relations theory is concerned with the power individuals and organizations have to exercise to advance their own interests [31]. The theories of tourism collaboration must incorporate an understanding of power relations theory if they are to help us to understand why collaborative efforts succeed or fail [32]. Participation in decision-making process as seen in game theory is also applicable in PRT as one of the supporting factors in sustainable tourism development. The issues of power and authority need to be addressed at every stage of the collaboration process. This can be achieved by ensuring that all legitimate participants of tourism related activities in a local community are involved in decision-making process of sustainable tourism development [10].

These six theories have been applied to various tourism studies. The supporting factors from the theories are as summarised in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories</th>
<th>Supporting Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder Theory [ST]</td>
<td>Community attachment: Quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Exchange Theory [SET]</td>
<td>Tourism benefits; conservation of tourism environment; promotion of culture, festival and gastronomy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without or low negative tourism impacts [costs]</td>
<td>Community involvement, sense of community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Theory [NT]</td>
<td>Community participation/involvement/engagement in decision making process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Theory [GT]</td>
<td>Community participation/involvement/engagement in decision making process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power-Relations Theory [PRT]</td>
<td>Community participation/involvement/engagement in decision making process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This research has brought the theories as well as the concepts behind them together to identify the factors which might make the local community’s support for sustainable tourism, specifically for conserving and preserving heritage buildings of Taiping.

4.0 Methodology:

This study was accomplished by reviewing and drawing conclusion from the literature. Qualitative analysis technique which is content analysis method was used to analyze and interprets the literature. Onwuegbuzie et al., [2012] noted that, every selected literature whether representing qualitative, quantitative or mixed research that contains numerous sources of qualitative data such as theoretical framework, author’s conclusion and interpretation - thereby, justifying within-case qualitative analyses [33]. Further, when two or more sources are compared and contrasted, then cross-case qualitative analyses are justified. Content analysis technique is one of the various qualitative techniques that can be used to analyses literatures [33, 34]. Six [6] main theories that regularly used within the sustainable tourism literatures, which are; stakeholder theory, social exchange theory, network theory, game theory, strategic management theory and power-relation theory have been reviewed by employing this technique. This process involved simultaneous coding of raw data and the construction of categories that capture relevant characteristics of the document’s contents. The crucial step in conducting content analysis for this research was to develop a list of factors influencing community support towards sustaining heritage building in Taiping. A preliminary framework of community engagement for enhancing local community supports towards conserving and preserving heritage buildings in Taiping was developed at the end of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through the content analysis method of the previous literature, it was indicated several important factors can be adapted to get community supports towards achieving sustainable Taiping, specifically by preserving and conserving its heritage buildings. The factors are; tourism perceived benefits [19, 35, 36], negative tourism impacts [costs] [37], community attachment [19, 38, 39], community involvement [11, 19, 40], sense of community [40] and community participation in decision making process [11, 29].

5.1 A Community Engagement Framework for Taiping Heritage Town:

The support of the local community, specifically the private heritage building owners in Taiping is very crucial to ensure the buildings are sustained, preserved and conserved. Based on the SET theory, people will only involve and support the ‘heritage building preservation project’ when they perceived that the project is beneficial to them especially in term of economic benefits such as providing employment opportunities, business for local people, improvement in the conditions of roads and other public facilities, incentive for the preservation of heritage building, increase in revenue from visitors for local authorities and cultural exchanges between visitors and local community [19]. As a result where the local community benefits from tourism, there is likelihood that they will support the sustainable heritage tourism development project in Taiping. Therefore, based on the SET, perceived benefits is an effective predictor of the support for sustainable heritage tourism development by the local community [19]. A study on the effectiveness of the current community engagement strategy in Taiping can be delivered by considering the perceived benefit factor to be one of the support influencing factors that should be measured and improved by the local authority.

Past studies revealed that if the local community perceive that community-based tourism would make them incur more costs than the expected benefits, they are likely to oppose tourism development [37]. The perceived costs of sustainable tourism consists both social costs and cultural costs [19]. There are several factors that might make the heritage building owners in Taiping dissatisfied to the ‘heritage building preservation program’ some of the factor are such as: personal economic growth disruption and deterioration of quality of life; overused of recreational resources; community being overcrowded and deterioration of quality environment. Lee [2013] supported this classification, in terms of social costs, he identified increase in the prices of goods and services; cultural costs – for example; conflicts between visitors and residents, and environmental costs – increase in environmental pollution respectively [19]. In the case of Taiping, the issues of the implementation of guidelines that prevented the building owners from adding value to their properties [9] and other issues such as maintenance costs, safety and soundness of the old buildings and business competitiveness to the surrounding new economic growth areas are also the costs that cause the heritage building owners to against the sustainable tourism project.

Attachment is described as a psychological connection between people and specific objects. To understand human behaviours, past studies have developed attachment-related concepts including; attachments to community [39], places [41], and jobs [42]. Based on the studies, community attachment can be regarded as the social involvement and integration of an individual into community’s life and reflects an affective bond between an individual and a given community. Yunos et al., claimed that residents’ attachment to their
community is shown through the concepts of community identity, community dependence, social bonding within a community and affective responses on how they feel about a community. They also pointed out that any attempt to improve the environment without community involvement runs the risk of ignoring the real problems and seriously degrades the quality of any development [29, 43]. In the case of sustaining private heritage building in Taiping, the building owners’ attachment with the heritage building might encourage them to support the ‘preservation project’ so that they can preserve and appreciate the building. However, for them who has a very low attachment to the building and the community might demolish or leave the building abandoned in order to find a new economic growth and developed area.

Besides, community involvement is another factors of influencing community supports for a sustainable tourism project. It is described as the degree of a local community involvement in deliberating or sharing issues within the community [19, 29]. Past studies have assessed the contribution of the local community from tourism development with emphasis on the extent to which local community are participated or involved in tourism [39]. Community involvement plays a significant role in the sustainability of tourism because community involvement can promote the value of a community by improving the positive impacts of tourism and reducing the negative impacts. Byrd and Kayat stated that local community is an important stakeholder, their involvement is crucial for sustainable tourism development [11, 44]. In a heritage tourism destination, community’s involvement activities may include; provision of transportation services for the visitors, affordable and decent homestays or lodges, tour guides, demonstrating friendliness to the visitors and looking after the well-being of the rural tourists. For the case of Taiping, the heritage building owners’ involvement is very important to conserve and preserve the building so that the buildings will not look very poor and dilapidated. Their involvement are also very important to provide a good maintenance for the buildings so that the building are preserved for the tourism attraction and for the next generation to value the heritages.

Sense of community is an important term used in tourism development. Sense of community is the interdependence between individuals and communities [43]. It is the feeling of duty or obligation and commitment of an individual towards other members in the community develop over a period of time through cooperation and understanding of collective values, beliefs and interests among community members. Sense of community is a feeling of belonging to the community. A local community or residents will support sustainable tourism development where there is increased local pride which makes them feel more proud of their community and makes them feel good about themselves and the destination. Additionally, where tourism unites the community and encourages people to work and support each other [10]. This feeling should be developed among the heritage building owners in Taiping so that they will appreciate and support the sustainable heritage tourism development in Taiping.

Local community should be involved in the planning and management of sustainable tourism development and participation in the decision-making for sustainable tourism development in a community [19]. The local community should be encouraged to participate in sustainable tourism development-related activities. For example, local community participation in decision making process include the formation of association of tour guides, association of lodge and homestay owners where training are conducted for the members. Others include preservation of tourism assets, natural environment, management of carrying capacity, and collaboration in ensuring that tourist footprint is minimized. In addition, voluntary membership of various committees for annual events like food, cultural and youth carnivals should be encouraged and ensure that all activities are geared towards sustainability. Taiping can do more in terms of ‘conserving and preserving the heritage building for the future’ and ‘benefiting the present’ if it is supported by its local community, specifically the heritage building owners.

From the factors derived above and adapted of the community support theories and the concept of sustainable tourism, it can be concluded that having the factors of tourism perceived benefits, negative tourism impacts [costs], community attachment, community involvement, sense of community and community participation in decision making process are very important to get the private heritage building owners in Taiping engaged in the ‘preservation of heritage building project towards achieving sustainable tourism in Taiping’ as illustrated in Figure 1.

A study on the effectiveness of the current community engagement strategies that been implemented by the local authority of Taiping should be done as a starting point to develop a new framework of community engagement to achieve sustainable Taiping. The questions that should be asked include;

1. What are the efforts that have been undertaken in order to achieve sustainable heritage tourism in Taiping?
2. How the local community should be engaged in the sustainable heritage tourism process?
3. What are the costs, benefits and methods of implementation of the current heritage building preservation project in Taiping and their relationship to the level of community involvement in the project?
4. How to increase the support and engagement of local communities towards conserving and preserving heritage buildings in Taiping?
Fig. 1: A Conceptual Framework of Community Engagement towards Sustainable Heritage Tourism in Taiping.

Conclusion:
This paper concludes that the ability to engage and get support from the local communities, particularly from the private owners of heritage buildings are very important for Taiping to uphold the legacy of sustainable heritage tourism by 2020 as outlined in the ‘RKK Taiping Heritage Area’ and also for the future. The finding of this study is very useful to provide a starting point for formulating a comprehensive framework and guideline of community engagement for enhancing local community supports towards conserving and preserving heritage buildings in Taiping.

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