

Barriers To Integrating Tourism In The Development Planning: The Perspective Of The Malaysia Local Authorities

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This paper discusses the barriers faced by the local authorities in Malaysia in integrating tourism in their development planning. This study undertook a quantitative survey. The questionnaires were sending out to 99 local authorities in Peninsular of Malaysia and 50% respondent rate were obtained. The findings show that 49 percent of Malaysia's local authorities have formulated policies related to tourism development in their area of jurisdiction. Financial restriction, which is high cost, has been identified as the major barrier for those LAs in integrating tourism in their development planning and policy formulation. The findings also revealed that time constraints and view that tourism activities as not being an important contributor to their revenue are among the factors that prevent them from integrating tourism in their development planning.

Key words: local authorities, tourism industry, development planning, Malaysia

Introduction

The Malaysian government has identified tourism as one of the national key economic area (NKEA). This is part of the government policy to diversify the Malaysia income and less depending on the export. Consequently, by 2011, revenue from tourism increased significantly (RM 37.4 billion) and tourism had become the seventh largest contributor to the nation's Gross National Income (GNI) (ETP, 2011). Malaysia also ranked 9th among the top most visited countries in the world, with 24.6 million international tourist arrivals (the Star, 2012).

Despite its economic contributions towards national development, tourism has not enjoyed the recognition it deserves from the policymakers and world leaders (UNWTO, 2010). Even though the tourism activities have generated positive results in terms of development of destinations and host country's incomes. Uncontrollable tourism development also created negative impact towards the local cultures and environment (Javier & Elazigue, 2011). It such, a need to develop a safer approach towards tourism is needed, which leads to the integration of tourism in the

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government development plans. Thus, one of the government agencies which played a major role in ensuring the sustainability of tourism development is the local authorities (LAs) (Javier & Elazigue, 2011).

The local authorities play important roles on the success of its local tourism industry, as well as have a strong influence in conserving the environment (Dredge & Moore, 1992; Inskeep, 1994). Thus, proper planning and decision making by the LAs in order to maintain the success of local tourism industry without neglecting the environmental preservation is necessary. Despite LAs' responsibility in facilitating the tourism development in their area of jurisdiction, they are also challenged and burdened in fulfilling other core responsibility which is serving the local community (Javier & Elazigue, 2011).

In Malaysia, the main responsibility of the local authorities is serving their community in terms of facilitating and maintaining public amenities. However, at the same time they also required to be responsible to generate incomes from the tourism activities by the federal government (Hamzah, 2004; Awang & Azizi, 2011). Hence, local authorities need to be more proactive in the planning, management and promotion of tourism. However, LAs have several major barriers from integrating tourism in their development planning which are the lacks of funding and qualified personnel (Hamzah, 2004).

Even though LAs is one of the key governmental agencies that played a role in ensuring the sustainability of tourism industry, less research has been done in identifying and understanding the problems being faced by them in integrating tourism in their development planning. Therefore, knowing the constraining factors that restrained the LAs from strategically integrating tourism in their development planning will help to identify what are the exact causes of the problem and indirectly provides the way to resolve this issue. For that reason, the objective of this paper is to discuss the barriers that faced by the Malaysian local authorities' in integrating tourism in their development planning.

The first section of the paper discussed the previous literature about the barriers faced by the local authorities in integrating tourism in their development planning. The second section continues with the explanation of research method used in this research. Then, follow with the main findings section. The last two sections will end up with discussion and conclusion.

Literature Review

While there is an increasing trend for councils and regional tourism organizations to develop tourism strategies, it appears that most of development plans adopt a more traditional marketing perspective with a view to promoting tourism in a region rather than creating clear links to the development policy by recognizing tourism impacts and the benefits of planning to control negative effects and maximize positive ones (Connel et al, 2009). Page and Hall (1999) argued that local authorities might not be well equipped to assess the effects of tourism. This is because tourism monitoring is not a major area of focus for the local authorities given that their main focus is on delivering services to local people, which is often done under severe budgetary constraints. However, because the implementation of tourism planning is within the hands of local councils, the effective translation of principles into policy and action is essential to progress the sustainability agenda.

Tourism was seen to be isolated and development plans tended not to be integrated into an overall comprehensive approach for locality (Javier & Elazigue,

2011). There is a wide range of concerns that local authorities could address in making decisions towards developing the tourism industry. Besides the strategic position to plan and facilitate tourism development in the LAs' areas of jurisdiction, they are also challenged by the realities of expanding roles and responsibilities. There are several researches that examined the barriers that lead the LAs not to integrate tourism policy in their development planning. For example, Leslie & Hughes (1997) found that local authorities and tourism in U.K often ignored tourism in their development plans and do not view the tourism as a main contributor on the employment potential and opportunities for economic growth. In general, lack of resources (i.e. financial, expertise, time and partnership) and poor in tourism management skills have hinder the local authorities in U.K to integrate tourism in their development planning. In other research done by Connel et al. (2009) at New Zealand local authorities found that the importance of tourism had decreased since tourism is not pushed as a beneficial economic activity by the local authorities and lack of effective leadership.

Among all, budget pressures, program prioritization, constraint in resources, as well as governance issues are the main barriers that hinder the LAs to integrate tourism in their development planning (Javier & Elazigue, 2011). As supported by Richins (2000) study regarding the factors that influencing the local government tourism decision making in Australia showed that factors of community needs have the greatest influence on tourism decision making in local governments. The same study also revealed that structural influence factors (including mandates, information and direction) have the second greatest influence. In other studies, Dredge et al. (2006) have identifies and list out the barriers that faced by the Australian local authorities in engaging with tourism. Below is the list of the major barriers hindrance local authorities' to integrate tourism in their development planning;

- Lack of resources (time, expertise, financial)
- Lack of leadership skills
- Lack of clearly a articulated vision and set of goals
- Volunteer fatigue
- Industry fragmentation
- Lack of clearly articulated relationships between politicians, public officers, business and the community
- Lack of reporting systems and processes
- Lack of understanding of legislative environment / legal authority and responsibilities

In Malaysia, local authorities do not regard tourism as their core business since their establishment under the Ministry of Housing and Local Government is for the purpose of providing and maintaining public facilities such as recreational areas, landscaping and garbage disposal (Hamzah, 2004). Besides of lack of funding and qualified personnel, another main reason for their reluctance to be actively involved in tourism is the lack of mechanism for direct revenue capture given that almost all income from tourism are channeled back to the Federal government coffers through taxation requirements (Hamzah, 2004). Based on the previous studies in different countries shown a similar pattern of problems, for example, financial limitation, lack of expertise, time constraint and others are the of barriers that faced by the local authorities in integrating tourism in their development program.

Methodology

This study used a quantitative survey to explore the sustainable development practices in local authorities in Malaysia. The previous study conducted by Vandegaer et al. (2008) about the barriers faced by local authorities in integrating sustainable element in the development planning authority's development policy has been adopted in this study. Then the adoption of research done by Connel et al. (2009) in identifying strategic impact of tourism and tourism development also adopted in developing the survey's questions. The questionnaire consists two sections. Section one is dealing with the demographical questions and sections two consists of questions that evaluate the implementation of tourism in the local authorities' development planning.

Between February to April 2012, self-complete questionnaires were mailed to all local authorities in peninsular of Malaysia. A pre-paid envelope was included for ease of return. The total respondents were covered all types of LAs which are 34 Municipality Councils (Majlis Perbandaran), 8 City Councils (Majlis Bandaraya), and 57 District Councils (Majlis Daerah). The survey was mailed directly to secretary of the councils, who can identify the most appropriate person to respond to the survey's questions.

Findings

Demographical information

This section revealed the findings about the respondents' demographical properties. The respondent rate for this study is approximately 50%. However, out of 50% respondent rate, 55% coming from district councils, 37% from municipal and 8% from city councils as illustrated at figure 1.

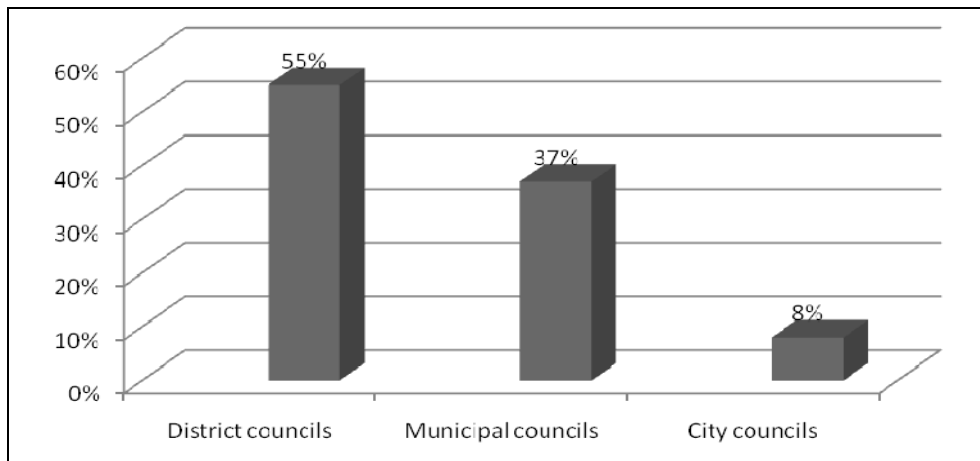


Figure 1: The percentage of councils returned the survey

Given that this figure represents half of all local authorities, the information that the survey is considered to be valid in providing a general picture of public sector responses to tourism development and planning in Malaysia, although non-responses deserve further consideration. The overall response rate is satisfactory and often a 30% response rate is deemed reasonable for such surveys (Connel et al., 2009).

Formulation policies related to tourism in the LAs' development planning

This part describes the percentage of local authorities who have formulated policies related to tourism in their development planning. The result demonstrates that not all local authorities have formulated policies related to tourism in their development planning. However, majority of local authorities have formulated policies related to tourism into their development plans. As shown in the following figure 2;

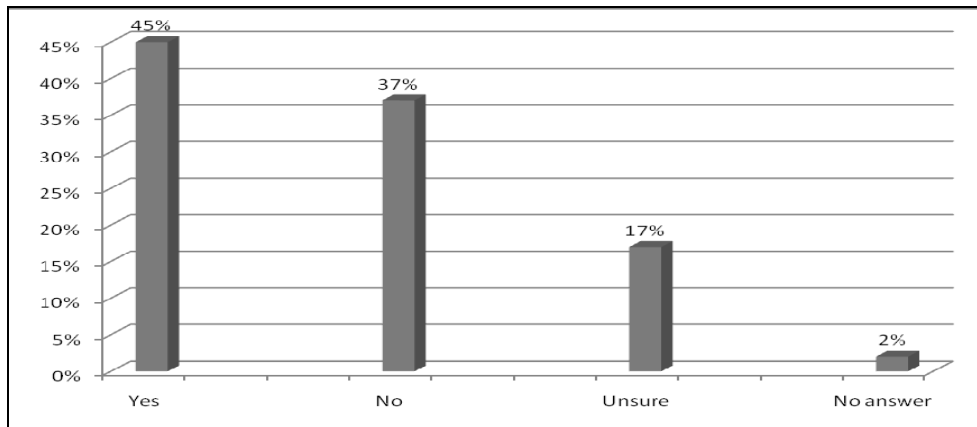


Figure 2: The percentage of LAs who have formulate policies related to tourism in their development planning

The finding revealed that almost 45% of the local authorities have formulated policies related to tourism in their development planning process. Meanwhile, 37% of them do not formulate tourism in their development planning. The remaining 17% were not sure and 2% have no answer for the question asked.

The main barriers in integrating tourism in the LAs's development planning

The analysis of the findings has identified eight main barriers that hinder the local authorities in integrating tourism in their development planning as depicted in figure 3.

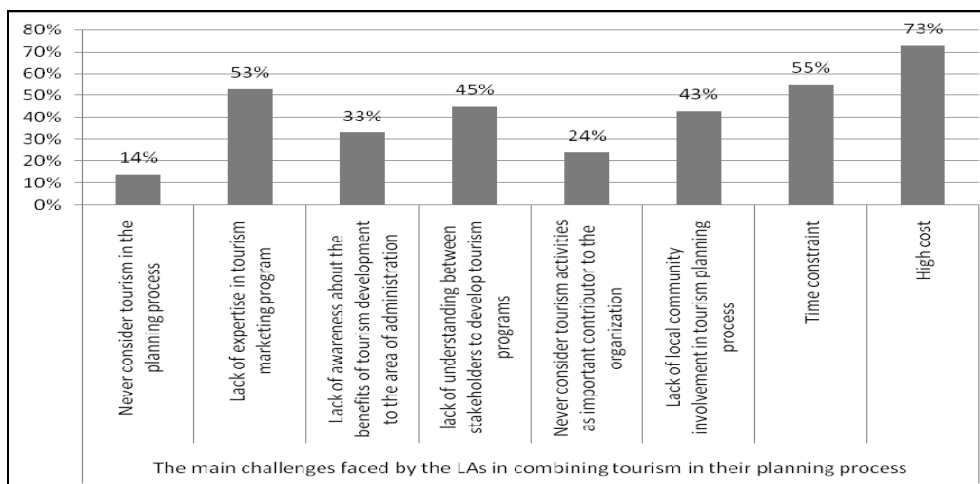


Figure 3: The main challenges faced by the LAs in combining tourism in their strategic planning process

As illustrated in the figure 3, 73% of the LAs felt that high cost as a main barrier for them in implementing tourism in their development planning. Meanwhile, 55% local authorities have chosen the time constraint as the second major factors that hinder the local authorities to consider tourism in their development planning. Then, 53% of local authorities identified lack of expertise as the third barriers that make the LAs unable to incorporate tourism in their planning setting. Furthermore, 45% of local authorities indicated that lack of understanding between the stakeholders in developing tourism programs as the fourth major barriers that hinder the integration between tourism and development planning. Lack of community involvement in tourism planning process has been identified by 43% of local authorities as among the top five main barriers faced by the LAs in integrating tourism in the development programs in their area of jurisdiction. However, a minority of local authorities (14%) indicated that never consider tourism in their planning process as the lowest among all the barriers that affected the LAs in considering tourism in their development planning.

Discussion

This study provides useful information regarding the barriers faced by the Malaysian local authorities in integrating tourism in their development planning. Thus, the results of this study had recognized eight major barriers that faced by the local authorities in integrating tourism in their development planning. Of all the problems that are identified, there are top five barriers identified by local authorities as the main barriers that hinder them from integrating tourism in their development planning.

First, majority of the local authorities have indentified that high cost is the main obstacles faced by the local authorities in integrating tourism in their development planning. The findings of this study are consistent with Leslie & Hughes (1997) study who found most of local authorities do not consider that tourism can generate employment opportunities and economic growth leads the LAs less emphasize on allocating budget and effort on tourism development programs.

Second, time constraint is secondly identified by the Malaysia local authorities that deter them to consider tourism in their development planning. This finding is in agreement with Dredge et al. (2006) study that most of local authorities suffered from lack of resources such as time constraint that drive them to ignore tourism in their development planning. This result may be explained by the fact that the local authorities main responsibility is providing service to the public the LAs are focusing more on the areas where they can utilize the time and money to accomplish their main purpose of providing and maintaining public facilities such as recreational areas, landscaping and garbage disposal rather than allocating those amounts of budget and time to the non-core activities such as tourism development (Hamzah, 2004).

A third main barrier is lack of expertise in tourism marketing program. These results are consistent with those of other studies and argued that lack of qualified personnel in managing tourism activities was derived from the less empowerment and authorization regarding the tourism administration given by federal government to the local authorities (Awang & Aziz, 2011; Dredge et al, 2006; Hamzah, 2004). It seems possible that these results are due to the Malaysia LAs establishment is under the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and their main purpose is providing and maintaining public facilities such as recreational areas, landscaping and garbage disposal, the needs for qualified staff that specifically facilitating the tourism activities is not seen as a main thing to be focus with.

The fourth main barrier is regards with the issue related to the lack of awareness between stakeholders to develop tourism program. This also accords with the earlier research done by Porter and Hunt (2005), which showed that the involvement of stakeholders' is highly depending on the vitality of discursive democracy and less standard bureaucratic boundaries between LAs and its stakeholders. Another possible explanation for this is that Malaysia decentralize governmental operating style is still dominating the government agencies working procedures, is very difficult for community voice to be heard and no common ground can be established to better off the tourism development agenda if the gap is too big between local government and its stakeholders.

The last but not least, the fifth barrier that hinder the process of integrating tourism in the LAs' development planning is lack of awareness about the benefit of tourism development to the LAs area of administration. The explanation of this fifth barrier can be viewed as an outcome resulted from other barriers discussed earlier. There are several possible explanations for this result, resource limitation such as time, financial and expertise as suggested by Dredge et al. (2006) might derived the LAs to ignore the potential of tourism industry in their development planning. Besides that, the LAs are required to focus on their core responsibility which is maintaining and facilitating public facilities. For that reason, less time and financial contributions were placed in tourism development. These arguments might answer the reason why the local authorities consider tourism is less beneficial to them.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that local authorities played a major role in facilitating and developing tourism industry in their area of jurisdiction. However, the local authorities also faced many challenges and barriers in integrating tourism in their development planning. The identified barriers faced by the LAs in integrating tourism in their development planning assists in understanding of the challenges that hinder the LAs to play more active roles in enhancing the tourism industry in their area of jurisdiction. The findings might help the central and/or state government in Malaysia to identify the real causes of hindrance for the LAs in integrating tourism in their development planning. Consequently, they could provide a solution to overcome the barriers in order to ensure the tourism industry is continuously able to contribute to the national's incomes and job opportunities.

The purpose of this study set out to determine what is the barrier faced by the Malaysia local authorities in integrating tourism in their development planning. The results of this study indicate that the local authorities in Malaysia faced many obstacles in integrating tourism into their development planning. The study has shown that 1) high cost; 2) time constraint; 3) lack of expertise in tourism marketing program; 4) lack of understanding among between stakeholders to develop tourism and, 5) lack of awareness about the benefits of tourism development to the area of administration are among the top five barriers that faced by the LAs in integrating tourism in their development planning.

It is recommended that further research be undertaken in this area is needed especially comprehensive qualitative research or case study based research to obtain an understanding of the challenges faced by the LAs in integrating tourism in their development planning. By doing so, the data generated from this kind of research may provide more practical solutions and suggestions to the LAs in helping them to be more proactive in sustaining the tourism industry in their area of jurisdiction.

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