A Community-based Geotourism Entrepreneurship: A Case of Kilim Geopark, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Geotourism is a growing industry in Malaysia. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation’s (UNESCO) has included Langkawi’s 99 islands in its global geopark network. One of the most popular geopark sites in Langkawi is Kilim Karst, originally developed as a fishing community under the management of the Kilim Community Cooperative Society (KCCS). Following Kilim’s recognition as a geopark, the role of the KCCS has evolved to encompass the management of local geotourism activities, ensuring that the community’s involvement is consistent with UNESCO’s sustainable development benchmarks. This study discusses the role played by geoparks and geotourism in the cooperative community entrepreneurship of local populations. Using the interview method, the authors consider the role of community-based entrepreneurships in developing geotourism in Kilim. With the full cooperation of the local government, the KCCS helps to develop local entrepreneurs who lack fundamental business knowledge. The authors review the performance of the KCCS based on their 2011–2014 annual general meeting report. The results of this review, coupled with the growing number of tourists, reveal the success of the KCCS’ commitment to supporting local entrepreneurship. The proceeds of these activities have subsequently been redirected to the diversification of the KCCS’ business portfolio for the sustainability of the community.

KEYWORDS
Community-based Entrepreneurship, Geotourism, Kilim Community Cooperative Society, Kilim Geopark

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry plays a vital role in stimulating the economies of many developing and developed countries (Chaiboonsri & Chaitip, 2008). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2015) reported that international tourism peaked at 1,245 billion in 2014 and with an expected annual growth rate of 3.3% over the 2010–2030 period. Nonetheless, this growth rate is expected to slow over time, from 3.8% at the beginning of the period to 2.9% by 2030. Malaysia is a multicultural, developing Southeast Asian country and has recently been described as a promising tourist destination (Marzuki, 2010). With 23.6 million tourists visiting Malaysia in 2009, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) ranked Malaysia the 9th most visited country that year and 10th in 2012 with over 25 million tourists (Mosbah & Abd Al Khuja, 2014). In 2014, Malaysia recorded 27,437,315 tourist arrivals, a growth of 6.7% compared to 2013. Total tourist receipts increased by 7.99%, generating MYR65.44 billion (UNWTO, 2015). Consequently, rural and geotourism is...
regarded as a stimulus for income and job creation, improving the quality of life of rural populations and redistributing income in rural areas (Liu, 2006).

Farsani, Coelho and Costa (2011) suggest that geotourism, as a form of educational tourism, is a fairly recent innovation. While Dowling (2010) defines geotourism in terms of a narrow focus on geology and landscapes, Dowling acknowledges that geo activities (e.g. visiting a geosite’s visitor centre) also constitute a form of geotourism (Newsome & Dowling, 2010). Conversely, Farsani, Coelho and Costa (2011) offer a broader definition of geotourism that includes an appreciation of indigenous cultures, thus challenging the tourist to respect the imperative of preserving both. Geotourism aims to have a negligible impact on natural resources while simultaneously promoting the economic growth of native communities. Sustaining the development of the geotourism industry, however, demands that a system of geoparks be maintained with minimal disruption to their native habitats. These virgin terrains provide surrounding communities with an indispensable resource for the development of a rural tourism industry, thereby reducing rural unemployment and minimising the effects of urbanisation.

According to the Members of Geoparks (2012) and others (Farsani et al., 2011; Newsome et al., 2012), the geopark concept incorporates the geological, archaeological, ecological, historical and cultural significance of a site. In many societies, social, natural and cultural heritages are inextricably linked such that they cannot be separated (UNESCO, 2006). In Asia, only five countries have received international acknowledgement, including China with 26 geoparks, Japan with five geoparks, and Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam with only one geopark each. Geoparks are administered under the jurisdiction of a nation’s federal government and local authorities (Farsani et al., 2011). However, a new strategy in the administration of geoparks is to encourage more sustainable development of the geoparks themselves and to enhance the socioeconomic development of local communities through their participation. The hosting of ecotourism activities in geoparks stimulates the growth of local economies by providing employment opportunities, contributes to the improvement of local facilities and infrastructure and supports local communities by encouraging the production of local products and improving community welfare.

Having defined the geopark, another key term appearing throughout this analysis in need of defining is geotourism. Geotourism is a form of nature tourism focused on landscapes and geology. Geotourism promotes tourism to geoparks, the conservation of geodiversity and an understanding of earth sciences. These objectives are achieved through visits to geological features, the use of geo-trails, guided tours and the patronage of geosite visitor centres (Newsome & Dowling, 2010). Notwithstanding, the governance of ecotourism should involve all stakeholders, not just the local community, when developing strategies and policies for the use and conservation of a geopark’s natural resources (Chan et al., 2010). While conserving an area’s natural and cultural resources, it is also important to maintain the health of local communities. Consequently, local communities are collaborating with other stakeholders to develop geoparks and embrace additional economic activities (Komoo, 2010). Nonetheless, the growth of geotourism has received little attention in the literature. Therefore, in light of this gap in literature, the authors set out to investigate cooperative community entrepreneurship in the context of geotourism.

This paper focuses on the role of geoparks and geotourism in cooperative community entrepreneurship and then opens with a review of the literature which is followed by introductions to geotourism in Malaysia. The data were collected through a literature review, and the responses from the qualitative research methodology of semi-structured interviews, then described the findings which are discussed before a final conclusion. The results demonstrate the strategies adopted by geoparks in order to improve geotourism and the development of local communities.
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