SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPLY IN THE NATIONAL PARK: A CASE FROM PHA TAEM NATIONAL PARK, THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to present the sustainable development of the environment in the Pha Taem national park in Thailand. It is in the context of the environmental supply for Eco-tourism and nature-based tourism. The study is in the area of the Pha Team National Park (PTNP) in Thailand, which consists of natural and historical features. PTNP has a distinctive geomorphological appearance. The uniqueness of the national park makes it more valuable as a site for not only establishing a national park but a geo-park as well. The PTNP is located on the edge east of Thailand's territory. The boundary of the PTNP is along with Thailand and the Lao PDR border across the Mekong River. This study employed a semi-structured interview with the national park staff and superintendent. Fifteen questions ranging from the perspective of sustainable tourism development goals to environmental supply were posed to the respondents. The findings demonstrated that to successfully manage the national park and achieve its sustainable tourism development goals the national park should be careful with its management plan and deal cautiously with stakeholders. The national park tourism management plan should include the stakeholder in the planning process to avoid potential conflicts. Moreover, it is necessary for effective tourism management that the park staff enhance their expertise and skills with regard to the tourism operations and tour management aspects of the park.

KEYWORDS: Sustainability, national park, environmental supply, tourism

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Tourism is one of the economic activities that enhance the revenue to the national park. On the other hand, tourism could cause more harmful issues to the natural environment in the park. Hence, sustainable tourism development plays an essential role in the framework that aims to protect the environment and provide quality experience to visitors (UNWTO, 1998).

The tourism landscape at any destination is the consumer product that relies on selecting the right supply (Hall, 1998). The term environmental supply is the concept developed by McNicol (2015), which tries to balance the management of ecological health and visitor demand.

It consists of policies and guidelines, zoning and access, environmental impact assessment, educational interpretation, and communication (McNicol, 2018). The environmental supply concept is based on the sustainable development goal, which adds up the tourism operators' perspective for expanding the park management from the commercial tourism and private sector's point of view.

In this regard, this study aims to understand the sustainable development of the environmental supply in the context of the national park in Thailand. In the context of the national park, it provides the experience of Eco-tourism and Nature-based tourism to the visitor.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the methods involved in the semi-structured interview with the national park staff and superintendent. Fifteen questions range from the perspective of sustainable tourism development goals to environmental supply. The data collection was the interviews and took on average one hour to complete

The interviews were transcribed for data analysis. The study area of this research consists of the natural features and the historical attractions in the Pha Taem National Park (PTNP). PTNP has a distinctive geomorphological appearance, and the prehistoric painting dating back between 3,000 and 4,000 years ago on the surface of the cliffs in the PTNP.

The archaeologist interpreted the wall paintings that humans settled in this area between 1,400-6,000 years ago (PTNP, 2019). The uniqueness of the national park makes PTNP more valuable as a site for establishing not only a national park but also a geo-park as well. PTNP is located on the east edge of the Thai territory. The boundary of the PTNP is along the Thai and Lao PDR border across the Mekong River.

FINDINGS

The results demonstrate that the goal of establishing the PTNP boundary is for the protection of the natural resources, the conservation of biodiversity and the provision of a quality experience with the nature-based tourism, adventure tourism and historical tourism as well as research in the PTNP.

The goal of gazettement a national park in Thailand, is the framework for the development of the tourism industry at PTNP and ensuring that it is sustainable. Moreover, the environmental supply consideration of the PTNP could be described as the tourism policies, and guidelines are based on the goal of sustainable tourism development.

The National Park Act prescribed the zoning and access of the park in 1961. The environmental impact assessment procedure took place while the PTNP was still developing its tourist offerings. An education programme has been bundled together with the exhibition, the nature tour guide, and the publication such as a brochure.

The last indicator of environmental supply in the PTNP is the communication with the stakeholders; the PTNP appointed the public and private sector in the Ubon Ratchathani province to be on the PTNP advisory board; however, the management plan was only for the PTNP's staff. With regard to the communication with the visitors, the PTNP uses social media websites to communicate with visitors about the tourism services and the information on the attractions, activities, accommodation, access, and its amenities.

CONCLUSION

This study on the sustainable development of the environmental supply in the national park: a case from Pha Taem National Park, Thailand, is aimed at understanding the sustainable development requirements of the environmental supply in the context of the national park in Thailand.

The results show that the PTNP management is comfortable with both the sustainable development and the environmental supply concepts. However, the inclusion of the stakeholders in the planning process is relatively limited and plans are dealt with solely by park's staff.

Therefore, it is necessary to communicate effectively with all stakeholders, especially the local community, to enhance tourism development in the PTNP. Moreover, the park staff must be trained in standard operating procedures for handling tourists in order to maintain a high level of visitor satisfaction at the park.

CONTRIBUTION/PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This research paper aims to follow the environmental supply concept from McNicol (2015), which switched the direction of the tourism landscape measurement in national parks. It turned the negative into a positive by focusing on quality success factors.

This study is a preliminary study of a sustainable tourism development project in the unique Pha Taem National Park in Thailand. The findings contribute to the currently available literature on sustainable tourism development in national parks by using environmental supply indicators. The results could apply to the improving the processes and management planning of the national park.

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