

Factors of trans-boundary tourism sustainable development in dynamics of South-East Asia regionalization (the case of Thailand- Laos - China tourism cluster)

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Abstract. One of the most notable tourism occurring in the global travel industry today is the growing of trans-boundary tourism especially in context of ASEAN countries. Thailand in particularly, has faced with the dramatically growth of tourist numbers across the border area of R3A (Thailand, Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Southern Republic of China) in addition to immerging negative impacts to the destinations and their local communities. To maximize benefits from the situation, this study aims to investigate the potential and readiness of trans-boundary tourism system and types of tourism that promoting tourism linkage within the travelling route of R3A. Four case studies were investigated including Chiang Khong district in Thailand, Luang Namtha in Laos PDR, Xishuangbanna and Kunming in the Southern Republic of China.

1 Introduction

According to ADB, the concept of the 'Economic Corridors' was initiated as a strategy to spur economic development in the GMS as well as ASEAN community. As the 'Economic Corridors' aims at attracting and sustaining interest in both infrastructure project development and direct investments in business opportunities, it plays an important role in economic cooperation in the region.

The Northern Economic Corridor of the Greater Mekong Subregion (R3a), running 1,861 kilometres from Chiang Rai's Chiang Khong district in Thailand to the city of Kunming in Yunnan province in southwestern China via Laos, aims to ease travel for tourists wanting to explore foreign cultures and commerce traders seeking new opportunities in neighbouring countries.

Along R3a, they offer exceptional diversity and richness of tourist destinations and attractions. Moreover, regional development of connectivity and tourist infrastructure created rapid growth of the subregion's tourism industry and its markets. For example, the growth of Chinese tourist numbers on R3a is recently significant. However, the tourism

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growth does not only contribute to local economic benefits but threatens the industry's sustainability by overburdening host communities, infrastructures, environment, cross-cultural communication and visitor management issues in addition to negative impacts on socio-culture and environment in destinations along the R3a.

These dynamics have created a dire need for development and management of trans-boundary tourism that ensure sustainable and equitable regional growth while enhancing benefit sharing amongst tourism stakeholders [1]. Thus, this study aims to investigate the potential and readiness of trans-boundary tourism system and types of tourism that promoting tourism linkage with-in the travelling route of R3A.

2 Literature Review

To achieve the objectives of this study, concepts of tourism system and sustainable tourism is explored. According to Dimitrios Buhalis (2000) [1], destinations are amalgams of tourism products, offering an integrated experience to consumers. Traditionally, destinations are regarded as well-defined geographical areas, such as a country, an island or a town [3,4]. In addition, Sitikarn (2008) [5] purposes a model of sustainable Small Medium Tourism Enterprise (SMTEs) that emphasizes on various aspects of human resource development, finance, operation of tourism products and services, marketing and tourists 'demand.

In aspects of sustainable tourism, sustainable and competitive tourism are not achievable without a consumer response [6]. More should be done to raise awareness. However, messages should be positive and consumer focused, putting across the benefits to them of forms of tourism that are socially and environmentally responsible [7].

Similarly, Swarbrooke [8] points out three dimensions of sustainable tourism, including 1) the environment, both natural and building, 2) the economic life of communities and companies, and social aspects of tourism, in term of its impact on host cultures and tourists, and the way in which those employed in tourism are treated.



Fig. 1. Map of Case Studies on R3a.

3 Methodology

Six case studies on R3a were investigated including Chiang Khong and Chiang Saen districts in Thailand, Huayxai and Luang Namtha in Laos PDR, Xishuangbanna and Kunming in the Southern Republic of China as shown in Figure 1.

Mixed research methods of qualitative research and quantitative research were employed for data gathering both primary data and secondary data. These include in-depth interview, focus group discussion, participatory rural appraisal (PRA) in addition to observation technique.

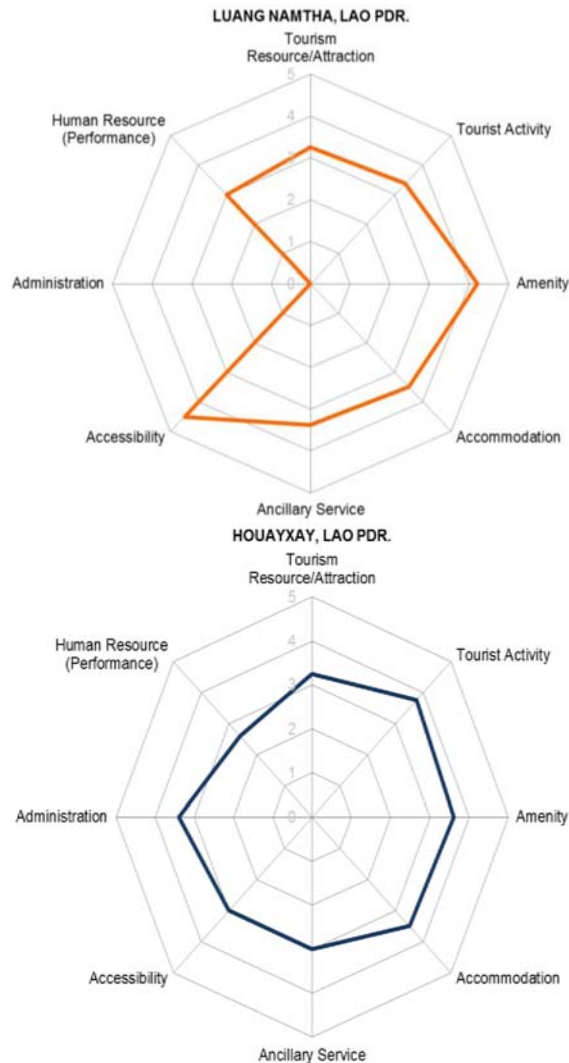


Fig. 2. The potential and readiness of trans-boundary tourism system in Laos PDR.

The purposive sampling technique was employed to the key informants who are tourism stakeholders in all sectors in the case study destinations. In addition, questionnaire survey was employed to explore tourist's satisfaction on trans-boundary tourism system on R3a route.

The accidental sampling technique was employed to 400 Thai and international tourists visiting the case study destinations. Moreover, field/street surveys on R3a was also employed to gain actual facts and experiences that enable the triangulation of data analysis of trans-boundary tourism system and identify appropriated types of tourism that can be promoted as tourism linkage with-in the travelling route of R3A. Further, an evaluation

form of the potential and readiness of trans-boundary tourism system were directed to local tourism stakeholders in the destination.

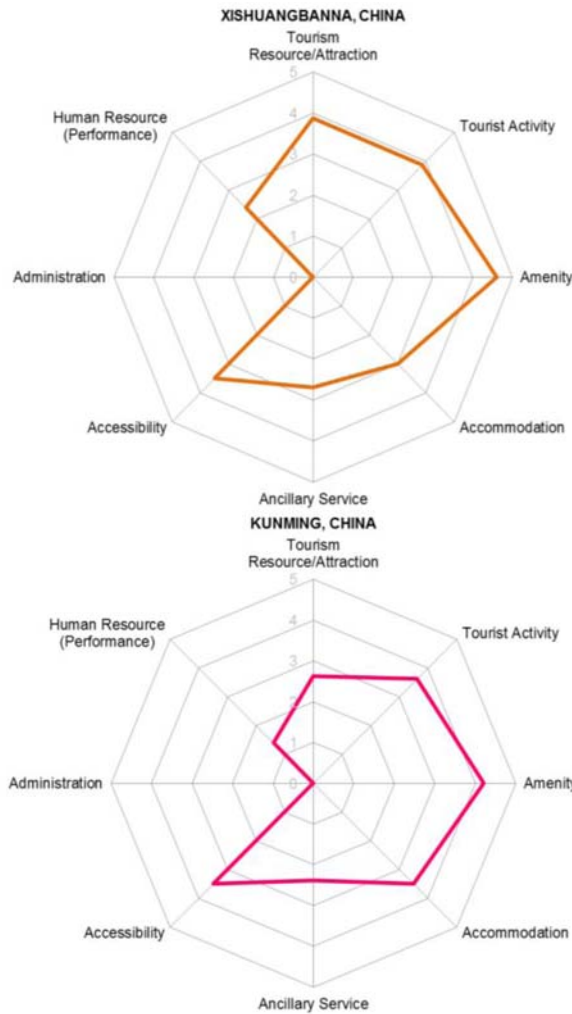


Fig. 3. The potential and readiness of trans-boundary tourism system in The Republic of China.

The purposive sampling technique was employed to all key informants. Thematic analysis was employed for qualitative data whereas SPSS, descriptive analysis and content analysis were employed for quantitative data. Linkert scale of 1 to 5 or the lowest to the highest level of the potential and readiness of trans-boundary tourism system was employed to explain data.

4 Findings

4.1 The potential and readiness of trans-boundary tourism system

The study revealed that in Laos PDR, the two destinations have potential and readiness of tourism system in different levels.

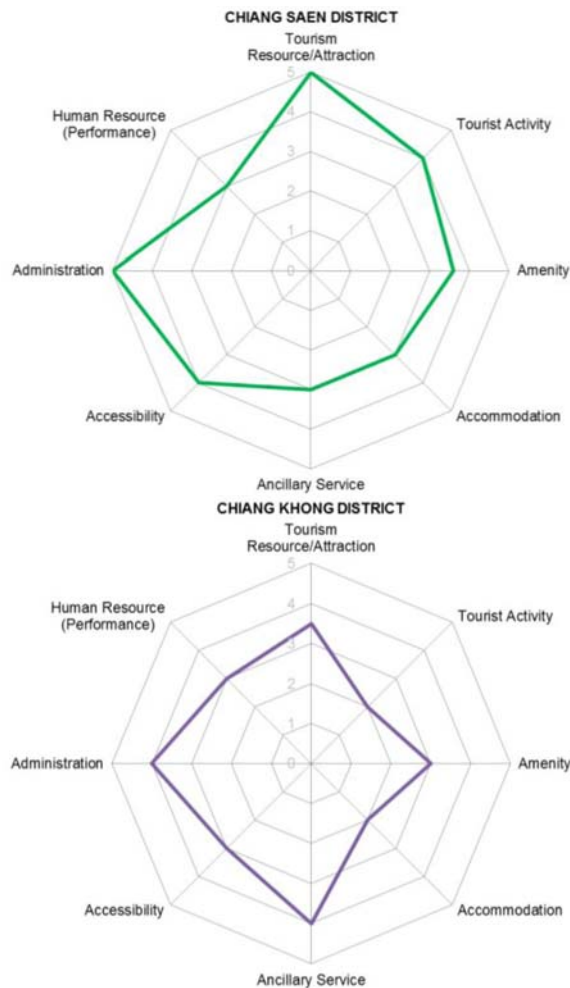


Fig. 4. The potential and readiness of trans-boundary tourism system in Thailand.

In Huayxai, tourism activity has high potential and ready to serve tourist due to variety of attractions both in natural environments and socio-culture of the ethnic groups whereas human resource performance is the lowest level.

In Luang Namtha, The accessibility and amenity aspects is in high level whereas administration issues is the lowest level of potential and readiness.

This is because Luang Namtha is situated in the mainland and does not have any cross-border checking points and services. In general, potential and readiness of transboundary tourism system in both Huayxai and Luang Namtha are in the same moderate level in aspects of accommodation, ancillary services and attraction as shown in Figure 2.

In the republic of China, the study revealed that accessibility and amenity in Xishuangbanna and Kunming are in high level of potential and readiness whereas administration issue is in the lowest level. This is because Xishuangbanna and Kunming are situated in the mainland and do not have any cross-border checking points and services. In Xishuangbanna, the potential and readiness of attraction and activity is in high level, accessibility is in moderate level whereas accommodation and human resource performance is in low level as shown in Figure 3.

In Thailand, the study revealed that Chiang Saen and Chiang Khong have potential and readiness of tourism system in different levels but share aspect of human resource performance which is in moderate level. In Chiang Saen, potential and readiness of attraction and administration is in the highest level whereas activity, amenity and accessibility are in high level. In Chiang Khong, the potential and readiness of administration and ancillary services are in high level, attraction and amenity are in moderate level whereas activity and accommodation are in low level as shown in Figure 4.

In comparison, most destinations share the same level of potential and readiness in aspect of accommodation, whereas human resource performance in Thailand is in the highest level. Chiang Saen has the most potential and readiness in aspects of attraction, activity and administration whereas Chiang Khong has high potential and readiness in ancillary services aspect. Luang Namtha has high potential and readiness in accessibility aspect whereas Xishuangbanna has high potential and readiness in amenity aspects.

4.2 Types of tourism that promoting tourism linkage with-in the travelling route of R3A

Based on the diversity of tourism resources in the case study destinations, the study revealed that 7 types of tourism including ecotourism, agro tourism, heritage tourism, food tourism, ethnic tourism, Buddhism tourism and experiential tourism are identified as tourism linkage on R3A and ASEAN community as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Tourism Resources in R3a, categorized by destinations.

Type of Tourism	Tourism Resources					
	Huayxai	Luang Nam tha	Xishuang banna	Kunming	Chiang Saen	Chiang khong
Ecotourism/Natural/Adventure Tourism	√	√	√	√	√	√
Community Based Tourism:	-	-	-	-	√	√
Agro Tourism	√	√	√	√	√	√
Cultural Heritage Tourism	√	√	√	√	√	√
Food Tourism	√	√	√	√	√	√
Buddhism Tourism	√	√	√	√	√	√
Experiential Tourism	√	√	√	√	√	√

5 Conclusion and Discussion

This study was intended to investigate the context of trans-boundary tourism in aspects of potential and readiness of tourism system and explored tourism resources and identified keys issues for an achievement of sustainable trans-boundary tourism in relation to ASEAN community [9]. The issues tackled in this study may not be new in other destinations or other countries but it is so in terms of R3a.

The study found that potentiality and readiness of tourism system in the most destinations on R3a shall be enhanced raking from the most to the least issues as human resource performance, accommodation, ancillary services and tourist activity. Moreover, the study revealed the lack of policy and regulation enforcement on efficient trans-boundary tourism facilitation in accessibility aspects especially the single visa and customs issues.

In addition, researches in tourism development shall be strengthening on how to maximize the benefits from the success of trans-boundary tourism in the R3a and related destinations. In responding to economic corridors which aim to spur economic development and cooperation in the region, Trans-boundary tourism development along the corridors shall be highly recognized as one of opportunities that bring sustainable development and poverty reduction in the region [10].

To promote Trans-boundary tourism, it is important that the policy must be formulated based on the current situations, responding tourists' demand and address stakeholder's participation and collaboration and empowerment issues. It is also essential to improve rural and urban infrastructure, upgrade human resources in terms of tourism management and its operation in addition to hospitality and services.

Moreover, the government of each country shall cooperate and promote Trans-boundary tourism in the region through networking as a means to reduce poverty and mitigate environment degradation in the region. Zoning strategy and carrying capacity of host destinations must be highly considered in order to avoid any negative impacts on the destinations.

In ASEAN aspects, it is believed that the success of the Trans-boundary tourism will bring sustainable development and poverty reduction in the region particularly for the Least Developing Countries (LDC). In addition, promoting better means of regional communication and transportation to expand investment into different areas to enhance effective linkages of the trans-boundary tourism as a single tourist destination. Thus, collaboration on trans-boundary tourism in the region can be formulated in the form of networking. Co-marketing under the theme of 'Ten Countries-One Destination' is essential. As the destinations are different in every aspect, 'theme' of the region shall be identified to attract tourists as well as the traveling routes that join the destinations of the ten countries where tourists can enjoy tourist activities in each country. To create growth of the region's tourism industry, visitor's numbers must be increased for foreign exchange earning and revenue for the countries. Therefore, sustainability of Trans-boundary tourism will be achieved or not depending on its management and operation in the region.

In management aspect, keys success for facilitating sustainable trans-boundary tourism operation on R3A responding ASEAN community includes:

1. Upgrading accommodation, tourist activity, amenity, accessibility and, ancillary service in accordance with tourists' demand and destination context;

2. Enhancing capacity building of human resources especially in aspects of hospitality and services. Human resource development is the priority of the development process, it may take ages to become a success. Therefore, supporting from other key stakeholders is essential.

3. Promoting crossed cultural communication and understanding among tourism stakeholders is essential for resources conservation and economic development. However, currently most of tourism stakeholders, especially the local community do not have the knowledge, understanding and skills on tourism and its operation. Therefore, the knowledge on sustainable tourism operation, hospitality and services enhancement among the local tourism is critical.

4. Cross cultural visitor management and;

5. Collaboration with the respective national interests of the ten neighboring countries to promote the mutual benefits amongst them, facilitate consensus tourism development policy and planning, enhance capacity building of human resources and, promote co-marketing on trans-boundary tourism on ASEAN tourism.

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