



EXPLORING THE ROLE OF LOCAL CHAMPION IN COMMUNITY-BASED RURAL HOMESTAY IN MALAYSIA: A CASE OF HOMESTAY SUNGAI HAJI DORANI

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Abstract:

The homestay program is an essential driver for local community empowerment and distributed benefit individually or collectively. Most of the local communities in rural areas are encouraged to participate in this program due to their value-added income and platform to promote the local culture to tourists. However, incompetent leaders to lead Community-Based Rural Homestay (CBRH) become a challenge to homestay operators as they need a proactive leader to manage the activities and tourists at the same time. Poor leadership qualities affect the homestay program from being active in generating income and other benefits for the local community. Indeed, there is a need for the leader in a community project to act as the representative for the local community to guide them as the community may not be ready for the intended changes or development. Ten competencies were identified to explore the characteristics of local champions in the context of CBRH. A single case study has been used whereby this research was taken place at Homestay Sungai Haji Dorani. A mixed-method design is adopted in this research which is involved a questionnaire distributed to the homestay operators and the interview session with the local champion of Homestay Sungai Haji Dorani. The finding was revealed that fairness becomes a dominant competency of the local champion. In a nutshell, the local champion's role is crucial to facilitate the participation of the local community in tourism development. Furthermore, the local champion is also considered one of Malaysia's CBRH factor's internal success factor.

Keywords:

Local Champion, Community-Based Rural Homestay, competencies, Leadership

Introduction

Malaysia's rural tourism is printed for local communities to contribute to fantastic and varies cultures and values. The increase within the tourist arrival occurred while the tourism activities promoted the agricultural areas in Malaysia which with the help of nature have already got the strength within the cultural and historical aspects, ecotourism, relaxing and escapism amongst others. Undeniably, tourism is visible as a stimulating concern in improving the economy of the local people in a very geographic area. However, to make sure this industry is competitive in the market, local community engagement is critical to diversifying the agricultural tourism product and services to lift the local community's standard of living. Homestay Programme in Malaysia is renowned that has been introduced by the government as during that time the economy rely on the agricultural sector that can transform into one of the unique products when it breeds with the tourism sector. The promotion of community-based tourism in a rural setting was started in 1995 by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism (MoCAT). Over the years, the homestay program becomes an economic driver for the local community to give the visitors experience living within the lifestyle of the local people similarly as enjoying sightseeing the agricultural nature. Nonetheless, as the alternative tourism product experience, CBRH aims to generate income, improve the tourism facilities and stimulate the well-being of the local people. By participating as the homestay operators, these aims are seemed achievable for them. (Mapjabil et al., 2015).

Consequently, the execution of this program is reflected by using its capability for constantly generating earnings to the network and independently operated this program while not having bound with the term and condition similarly as no longer getting assistance from different agencies or government bodies (Mizal et al., 2014). Most of the previous studies on CBT became circling the story of the fulfilment of the comprehensive CBT program, which has a homestay program without a significant venture to in-depth research to research the aim for the successor to preserve the achievement. Recently, the local leadership is visible to be a prerequisite within the advance of rural tourism wherein the leader has to plan and manage the program and act because the consultant of the network somehow involves the technique, affect, and shared goals. The role of management in management has been getting attention from scholars and practitioners in network-based total tourism discipline and other disciplines similarly.

One of the most contributing factors in the success of CBRH is leadership competencies, whereby it has also been highlighted in the previous study as critical success factors in the community-based tourism field. Leaders are increasingly considered essential components of CBRH. However, the characteristics, attributes, and roles of the local leaders are limited in the literature. Additionally, the context of local leadership is seen neglected in the literature as success factors. Besides, leadership is also considered among many reasons for community success in fostering CBT (Amstrong, 2012 & Mascardo, 2008). However, Aref (2011) discovered it contradicts previous research where the success of local development primarily associated with CBT was counting on the standard of local leadership. Blackman et al. (2004)

agreed and revealed that successful CBT programs require a personal, namely as 'Local Champion' to motivate, coordinate the local people, deliver information, and function as 'mediator' between community and stakeholders.

From the Malaysian perspective, the term of the local champion has been used by Hamzah and Khalifah (2009) that represent the local people to empowered in tourism development through their participation and support. Furthermore, local champions very significant in rural development in Malaysia and considered an individual or a small group that plays essential roles helps to hasten within the community that engages in tourism activities. Besides, the local champion is considered to concert the crucial elements in a Community-Based Tourism setting. Initially, it's difficult to persuade the local people to participate in tourism activities, lacking in terms of assets or limited market access to start with; however, the commitment of local champions becomes the essential propulsion for community-based tourism. Fostering change and leading the community even tougher mainly involve on the community-large scale. Therefore, local champions in community development are hugely significant to community development success in a rural destination. However, Bowers and Hamby (2013) discovered that the volunteer leader and champion are not strictly related. Local champion is that the one who have the emergent qualities to steer local people, but the volunteer leader is regarded as well-trained to arrange program and events. Furthermore, volunteer leaders are always relatable to reward and recognition for excellent performance, enhance community motivation to interact, and sincerely encourage them. Thus, this research endeavours to explore the characteristics and role of the local champion of CBRH that required to sustain the success of the Homestay Programme.

Literature Review

There are four points will be discussed in literature review includes rural tourism development, an overview of the homestay programme in Malaysia and Selangor, leadership, and community support for the Community-Based Rural Homestay (CBRH)

The Development of Rural Tourism

The development of Malaysia's rural areas began long before the country's independence from the British in 1957. However, Maimunah and Bahman (1992) stated that for the first few decades of the twentieth century, the provision of irrigation and drainage systems was emphasised, along with advisory services to farmers. That was an effort to ensure that the food supply to cities would be maintained. Furthermore, under the supervision of the colonial government, rural development was focused on large plantations to serve the colonial economy and irrigation for agriculture. As a result, the majority of the rural population was unaffected by this development and continued to live in poverty.

This plan was highlighted on the infrastructural development and the continued growth in agriculture in the period 1950 to 1955, which covers the Draft Development Plan, where a Rural Industrial Development Authority (RIDA) was formed in 1950. They aimed to promote small-business training and development. Nonetheless, this effort was only partially successful due to a lack of basic amenities, health, and education in the local community population (Marzuki, A., Kausar, A., & Othman, A. G. 2010). However, in the late 1990s, there was a significant shift in the development of rural tourism. The Malaysian government made every effort to track all resources, including rural tourism products. In order to achieve sustainable tourism growth, rural tourism products and services are viewed as a medium for development

strategies, as they can help generate employment and income at the national, state, and local levels (Lo, M. C., et al. 2013). As a result, the focus of tourism development has been on maximising available resources, where an equal distribution of needs between tourists, the environment, and the local community is required. Technically, the tourism development strategies in the Eight Malaysia Plan (2001-2005) have had an impact on the development of rural tourism. The primary goal documented in this plan is to emphasise sustainable tourism while focusing on holistic strategies. The government has suggested that all forms of tourism that have the potential to revive the economy of the rural community while also relying entirely on the participation of the local community be tried.

Malaysia Homestay Experience Programme

Homestay holidays were first introduced in Europe in the late 1970s. However, the definition of the homestay programme may vary from country to country. For example, the homestay programme in Australia uses the term farm tourism, which is very similar to the concept of homestay in Malaysia. They provide tourists with sleeping accommodations, prepare breakfast, and allow tourists to participate in activities with the family farm operators. There are numerous other terms for the homestay concept, including farm stay, guest house, small hotels, cultural stay, and host families. Furthermore, the homestay concept encompasses not only cultural homestays but also educational homestays, heritage homestays, volunteer stays, and leisure stays.

Several researchers, including Kalsom and Nor Ashikin (2005), Amran (2006), Phonwiset et al. (2008), and Muhammad Farid (2009), as well as the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia (2011), agreed that a homestay is an experience in which tourists stay with a host family and are introduced to the host family's daily life and cultural practises. As a result, tourists have the opportunity to participate in routine activities while also exchanging knowledge and language through interaction with the host family. As a result, the homestay programme can be used as a platform to increase knowledge while also preserving a way of life and culture. As a result, homestay is more than just a mode of accommodation; it also provides tourists with lifestyle experiences, as well as local culture and economic activities (Kalsom & Nor Ashikin, 2005).

In general, homestay differs from other modes of accommodation in that it is located in a rural area, as opposed to other places, which are typically located in cities and urban areas. This is due to the fact that having homestay in a rural area allows the entire community to participate in the homestay programme while still practising traditional ways and culture in their daily lives (Salamiah, Othman and Maheran, 2011).

The homestay programme was founded in the early 1970s by Mak Long, a resident of Kampung Cherating Lama in Pahang who has been welcoming tourists and providing them with food and lodging in her home. In general, the homestay programme in Malaysia has been in place since 1995. The Malaysian homestay programme is one of the efforts that the Ministry of Tourism introduced to tourists in 1998 in order to create variety for tourism products by creating alternative accommodation in a rural destination that offers cultural and community-based tourism (Malaysia, 2007).

Homestay Program in Malaysia has distinct features that set it apart from other types of accommodation. This homestay is located in a rural area with a limited number of rooms and beds for guests, but the house is fully equipped with the necessary services. In addition, tourists will enjoy a relatively inexpensive vacation that is distinct from this programme. Tourists will live with a host family as part of this programme and will be able to see how they go about their daily lives. Indirectly, tourists will gain a better understanding of the lifestyle and culture of the people who live in the places they visit. Thus, the local community's commitment is required for the homestay programme in order to promote culture and lifestyle to tourists.

Aside from that, the homestay programme has the potential to be a medium for the success of rural development, as the government has invested funds to improve infrastructure and facilities in order to attract tourists. Furthermore, the homestay programme can help to generate jobs and improve the economy for the local community while also driving national growth because the programme has been promoted internationally. However, in order to sustain the performance of the homestay programme, homestay operators should work to improve their ability and leadership skills (Ramli et al., 2015). The development of the homestay programme appears to be highly dependent on how homestay providers diversify the tourism product that can be offered to tourists.

Sungai Haji Dorani Homestay is located in the northern part of Selangor Malaysia, in Kampung Sungai Haji Dorani. The homestay began operations in 1996 and was registered with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture (MOTAC) in 2000. This homestay has been in operation for nearly 23 years, attracting not only domestic but also international tourists. The homestay's strategic location, surrounded by paddy fields, has undoubtedly become an attraction for tourists seeking a peaceful atmosphere and escapism.

En Abdul Rahman bin Daud, the program's spokesperson, has overseen the operation of this homestay. The Sungai Haji Dorani Homestay programme includes five villages: Kg Sungai Haji Dorani, Kg Peket 20, Kg Sg Leman, Kg Parit 2, and Kg Sungai Nipah. This programme includes 20 homestay operators and 20 rooms, with 10 of the 20 homestay operators currently in operation.

Leadership in Rural Tourism Destination

Leadership is regarded as an essential component for any tourism organisation to function (Jafari, 2003). Typically, the success or failure of any such system will determine the quality of leadership. Furthermore, leadership can be defined as when an individual provides guidance and encourages a group of people to work together to achieve a common goal. As a result, the leadership process will include both leaders (those who engage in leadership) and followers (those to whom leadership is directed). Furthermore, leadership can be defined as a person who represents a group's will as a combination of special traits and attributes possessed by the individual that enable them to persuade others to complete tasks.

Leadership has received a great deal of attention in the literature, with a variety of theories emerging that focus on the characteristics and behaviours of individual leaders, as well as their relationship with followers. According to Chandra and Priyono (2016), the leader seeks the participation of employees with all their dedication and sense of ownership in the organisation through the power of mobilisation, motivation, and communication. Thus, the presence of leadership prevents employees from feeling isolated from the central authority, allowing them

to work with integrity and utmost commitment. Furthermore, leadership styles are frequently highlighted in the study of leadership. Leadership styles differ between industries and organisations, according to Zahari and Shurbagi (2012), and they also differ from situation to situation, according to Lok and Crawford (2004). As a result, the majority of leaders will tailor their leadership style to their organization's needs and working environment.

Leadership in rural tourism is frequently referred to as the collaboration of both tourism operators and local leadership in which they share their authority for sustainable development and that has become one of the successful factors in rural tourism development. As a result, local leaders must cultivate all leadership qualities in order to become effective leaders in all destinations at all levels, which includes not only the tourism sector but also governments, entrepreneurs, and business operators (Dwyer and Edwards, 2010).

Initially, leadership is important in CBRH because this programme is essentially a community programme that requires community participation. Poor leadership may cause the programme to be ineffective in terms of generating income and other community benefits. Furthermore, leadership issues, as well as poor communication, a lack of transparency, an informal management system, and personal interests, are bound to have an impact on the management of the homestay programme. Neither Ashikin nor Kalsom (2010) mention that if there is conflict within the community, the homestay sustainability may be jeopardised because it can spread negativity and break the unity, indicating the need for leadership in CBRH.

Several studies have emphasised leadership as one of the determinants in improving CBRH performance, which leads to the program's success. Daud (2015) discovered that the community has the highest average rating for their ability and capacity to run the programme, followed by their benefits management and resource conservation, as well as the leadership. Furthermore, Abdul Razzaq, Hadi, and Mustafa (2011) agreed that instilling leadership is a critical success indicator for the development of homestay programmes in Malaysia, along with local community knowledge and skill, community awareness, the power of community structure, and external partnership.

The Role of Local Champion in Malaysia Homestay Experience Programme

A leader is essential for the community because they may not be prepared for the intended changes or development. As a result, the leader or local champion for a successful CBRH should be able to fulfil multiple roles while also cultivating communication skills for the benefits of CBT. Furthermore, the leader must maintain their relationship with the external actor while attempting not to expand tourism activities that may exceed the community's carrying capacity (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). In the Malaysian context, Hamzah and Khalifah (2009) coined the term "local champion," which refers to the leaders involved in community-based tourism (CBT). So far, there is no clear definition of a local champion in the literature, particularly in terms of community engagement and participation. The local champion, on the other hand, can be defined as an individual or a small group who helps to advance community engagement in tourism activities. There are no specific requirements for becoming a local champion.

The project manager could be appointed by the government, a dedicated volunteer hired by an NGO, or a self-appointed community spokesperson. Worthy et al. (2016) discovered that a local champion can be one person, a group of people, or an organisation in a community.

Although it cannot be denied that local champions play an important role in rural development in Malaysia, there have been few studies on the role and characteristics of local champions. The role of the local champion in the development of rural tourism is critical. According to Mohammad, Hamzah, and Khalifah (2013), a local champion is one of the driving factors that influence the performance of CBT and community development in a rural tourism destination. The local champion will encourage the local community to participate in tourism-related activities. When the difficulty of approaching and persuading the community to participate is already vocal in this area, this role is extremely important. Furthermore, the local community expresses concern about limited market access as well as a lack of assets, which prevents them from participating in tourism activities. As a result, the local champion's ability to provide a platform for facilitation can be a powerful force for CBT.

In a nutshell, the role of the local champion is critical in facilitating local community participation in tourism development. Furthermore, the local champion is regarded as one of the CBRH factor's internal success factors in Malaysia. However, Kayat and Mohd Nor (2010) stated that the leadership issue has had an impact on the performance of the homestay programme as well as tourist arrivals. As CBRH grows, the role of the local champion becomes increasingly important in steering the development of the local community in the right direction.

Methodology

The preliminary site visit is required for the researcher to conduct qualitative research. The initial site visit in this research was carried out for a variety of reasons. Developing relationships with the local community and becoming acquainted with the study area and its issues are the primary goals. The second step is to put the research instruments to the test, which included interviews, document analysis, and direct observation. Another reason was to identify the preliminary visit's lessons learned. Finally, an initial site visit will be conducted to improve the research instrument.

Because this is the researcher's first visit to the area, a preliminary visit is important in this research because it allows the researcher to establish rapport with the local people and the site. Rapport is defined as a method of connecting and negotiating relationships by displaying similarities and matching experiences (Tannen, 1991). Affinity can also bring people together in ways that encourage trust and understanding. Establishing rapport, according to Knight (2009), entails developing the ability to appreciate other people's perspectives as well as understanding and accepting other people's feelings. One of the objectives of this visit is for the researcher to introduce themselves, allowing them to convey the purpose of the tour, the nature of the research, and the cooperation required from the local champion and the other homestay providers at Sungai Haji Dorani Homestay.

Furthermore, the first visit was critical in establishing friendships with the locals, which aided the researcher in conducting this study. It is impossible to deny that developing relationships with the local people can make the researcher's job easier. Bonding, according to del (2011), can assist participants in maintaining positive relationships because it is a mutual process that involves an interactive process. As a result, if field researchers use these, it may aid in eliciting attachment from participants. Furthermore, the appointment for the upcoming visit was discussed during this preliminary visit. This study's interview questions take the form of a semi-structured interview, which includes in-depth interviews, casual conversations, and informal

discussions. The interview structures for the local champion at Sungai Haji Dorani Homestay. Furthermore, during the data analysis stage, first-hand information and interactions with the site's local champion were critical in understanding the data.

The interview questions were divided into two sections, with each item aligned with the respective research objectives and organised in accordance with the flow of the research objectives. With the interviewees' permission, the entire interview session with the local champion was taped. In order to avoid losing important information from interviewees. The table of themes was also used by the researcher to help identify and organise research questions about specific issues.

Result and Analysis

The characteristics of the local champion of Homestay Sungai Haji Dorani were the subjects of the study, which aimed to investigate the characteristics of the local champion. After all, this study is still relatively new and has not yet been thoroughly investigated by a large number of researchers. As a result, there are only a few studies on this subject. So far, Hamzah and Khalifah (2009) have identified ten characteristics of a local champion: trustworthiness, perseverance, selflessness, patience, excellent communicator, disciplined, resourceful, visionary, proactive, courageous, and sensible. All of the indicators were evaluated by the followers, and the results were positive because the majority of them agreed that their local champion possesses that nature and can recognise when they are working together.

However, the characteristics of local champions are determined by more than just those ten indicators. Aside from the indicators included in the study, such as love, compassion, and empathy. Lickona (1994) divided good character into three interconnected parts: moral knowing (knowing the good), good feeling, and ethical behaviour. Caring, confidence, courage, curiosity, flexibility, friendship, humility, humour, initiative, integrity, patience, perseverance, and positive attitude, goal-setting, problem-solving, self-discipline, and teamwork were also listed by McElmeel (2002), who are amoral educators. As a result, the study includes some of the essential characteristics for the leader to cultivate.

As a result, the additional attributes received a positive response from the followers, with some of the specifics recording high percentages. As a result, the local champion's characteristics are limited for those ten indicators and the other components required for the local champion to nurture in order to improve CBRH performance. As a result, the first goal of the study, which was to identify the characteristics of local champions in CBRH, was met with more local champion characteristics that should be included in the list. Furthermore, the homestay operators were briefed on the role of the local champion as a motivator for them to participate in the Homestay Programme. They revealed that a local champion is someone who listens to find solutions to problems and asks questions with a positive attitude in situations where it is known that it is difficult to approach and persuade local community involvement in tourism.

To ensure the success of events, proper coordination is required, as the Homestay Program should facilitate tourist needs and desires, particularly in terms of services and packages offered. Furthermore, coordination is one of the roles of the local champion in ensuring the success of Community-Based Rural Homestay (CBRH). Local champions help with tourist distribution by providing resources and arranging meetings with other homestay providers. In their previous study, Mohammad, Hamzah, and Khalifah (2013) stated that where local

champions have the ability to provide a platform to facilitate can be a powerful force for CBT. As a result, the local champion will be in charge of obtaining resources and funds to support the Homestay Program. According to the local champion in Homestay Sungai Haji Dorani, he actively involved NGOs, government agencies, and private organisations.

With the help of their local champion, the homestay operators were able to secure funding for the Homestay Program. The local champion will not only coordinate the tourist distribution work and resources, but he or she will also arrange the meeting with the other homestay providers. Aside from that, the local champion must attend meetings, which are held in accordance with the frequency of customers' visits; if customers visit frequently, we will hold meetings more frequently. Furthermore, the local champion stated that the sessions would be held two weeks or a week before the event to coordinate what activities would be included and how many host families would be involved in one development.

According to Kayat and Mohd Nor (2010), the role of the local champion is critical in shaping the development of the local community in the right direction. As a result, promotion becomes one of the skills required of the local champion in order to introduce and raise awareness of the Homestay Program. The local champion of Homestay Sungai Haji Dorani is also in charge of promoting packages of activities in Homestay Haji Dorani through various channels such as mass media with RTM, UTUSAN, and nowadays it is simple as we encourage by using social media. Furthermore, he stated that Homestay Sungai Haji Dorani began their promotion by participating in the best village competitions, the best youth competitions, and a variety of other races. By winning the championships, many people will recognise the village's existence and be willing to visit the town. Because there is no capital in the city to build a hotel, a homestay programme was established where visitors can stay with a host family. It is the proper method of promotion because they first introduced the culture of welcoming guests to the local community before developing the tourism programme.

Conclusion

The characteristics and role of the local champion have been described in greater detail, which can lead to a better understanding of how important the local champion is to the success of the homestay programme. The local champion's statement has been cross-examined with the results of the questionnaires completed by the follower. As a result, it can be more durable and dependable. Throughout the study, it appears that the local champion plays a critical role in improving the performance of the homestay programme. As this study investigated the characteristics of a local champion, it discovered that all fairness was regarded as essential characteristics that a local champion sought after. However, it cannot be denied that the local champion must also develop and nurture the other character from various dimensions within himself or herself. According to Adair (2003), practise and experiences can help to develop leadership qualities.

Furthermore, support from the local community is required for the homestay programme to be successful. According to Jurowski, Uysal, and Williams (1997), the local population's support is critical for tourism to develop, sustain, and fully operate. The local community's support also has an impact on the arrival of tourists. Local champions cannot succeed without the community's support and cooperation. As a result, a good relationship between the local champion and their follower must also be emphasised in order for the homestay programme to run and remain in the tourism industry for a longer period of time. In a nutshell, the local

champion is critical in monitoring the effectiveness and long-term viability of the CBRH programme in rural community development.

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