

# Predicting Local Community Participation in Sustainable Tourism Planning for Tourism in Protected Area

Arni Abdul Gani\*, Mazlina Mahdzar and Intan Rahayu Abd Razak

**Abstract---** *Managing tourism in fragile areas such as parks and protected areas will require a more robust and meticulous approach. The concept of sustainability in tourism is by far seen is the one of the most suitable approach to be implemented in protected areas planning. When implemented, it will provide a context to guide decision choices as well as bring stakeholders together for a common interest in tourism matters. Sustainable development of any tourism attraction clearly stresses on the need for informed participation from all relevant stakeholders and this include the community. Despite this, in reality, the process did not happen thoroughly at all level in tourism planning in protected areas. Furthermore, evident of studies conducted to understand what factors will promote participation were lacking and understudied in local context. This study was conducted to identify factors that contribute to local community participation and examine the most significant predictors of participation for tourism planning in protected area. Results shown that two dimensions; situation specific and process – interest oriented emerged as the most significant predictors of local community participation. It indicates that attention to specific issues faced by the community in planning efforts will eventually enhance their involvement and facilitate cooperation in collaborative efforts between park management and the community.*

**Keywords---** *Tourism Planning, Local Community, Sustainable Tourism, Protected Area, Participation.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Protected areas are established to protect, conserve and control the natural environments. These protected areas often have specific objectives and are categorized according to their goal of establishment. International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines protected areas as “geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values” (IUCN, 2008). Despite of their conservation moves, many of these protected areas have opened their doors for visitors, which eventually promote tourism. The interaction between tourism and conservation is often seen as symbiotic (Budowski, 1976; Puhakka, 2008). Support and political pressure for creation of protected areas may grow while more and more people visit national parks and start to appreciate them (Eagles & McCool, 2002). The rapid growth of international travel today has resulted in the increased demand for better facilities and services at tourism destinations. This puts pressures to the management to come up with better planning and management to meet tourists’ expectations and demands. The increase in the number of visitors would then increase

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the requirement for new recreational activities and development of different kinds of services and facilities in the parks (Puhakka, 2008) such as better infrastructures including trails, bridges, and lodges. Greater attention in planning and management of parks and protected areas are now becoming significantly important and has raised the stakes for decisions on tourism planning in the protected areas (McCool, 2009). With the ever complex natural, social and economic background of protected area, this can portray as a challenge to the establishment of an ideal relationship where all the three fronts of the environment are balanced and there appears the discrepancy between theoretical and real field scenarios (Aryal, Ghimire, & Niraula, 2019). One of the major concerns in planning for tourism in protected areas relates to the issue of sustainable development of its resources.

Sustainability expresses the idea that people must live within the capacity of their environment to support them, where it is important to consider, especially in tourism industry as the industry depends on the maintenance of the environment qualities. As natural environments such as parks and protected areas are now open to public, the issues related to adopting correct and right ways towards sustainable development have become crucial. One of the concepts of sustainable development is that it requires collective action where inputs from all parties involved and those affected by the development projects must be considered. Relating to this, public participation in planning and management of the tourism area is recognized as one of the principles of sustainable tourism (Hall, 2000; Harper, 1997; Swarbrooke, 2002). Participation by the local people is deemed important and can have significant impacts on the projects and programmes developed in a particular area.

Despite its importance, often enough local knowledge is not properly sourced and considered in decision making process due certain issues such as validity of the knowledge for current situation at hand. As mentioned by Nakashima and Roue(2002), when the issue of indigenous knowledge is discussed often the discussion will circle around the validity and scientific aspects of the knowledge, either it is based on some empirical evidence or mere superstitions. Thus, in many occasions the public which include indigenous people are denied the rights to share their knowledge and voice their concerns during the decision making process. Absence of such important practice can be disadvantage to achieve greater public understanding on ecological concepts and principles, and to encourage meaningful and serious discourse between stakeholders. This is especially important for the planning and management of natural environment, where there is a crucial need for social science data such as intentions and perceptions of an issue are linked to biological and physical science information so help planners and managers of the destination.

## **II. THE PLANNING FOR PROTECTED AREAS IN MALAYSIA**

The protected areas in Malaysia were gazette primarily for preservation and protection of its flora and fauna. Malaysia is well known for its richness in biodiversity which encompasses of more than 170,000 species (NRE, 2012). As more species are yet to be discovered and studied, the number of species will increase. Malaysia's forest ecosystems range from terrestrial/dryland forest such as lowland dipterocarp forest to wetland forest such as freshwater swamp and mangrove swamp forest. The tropical climate, which is favorable for growth of plants and animals promote the diversification of flora and fauna in Malaysia forest. The designated protected areas covers area such as watershed protected areas, wildlife sanctuary with the total forest cover of Malaysia is estimated at 59.5% of the total land area (CBD, 2012).

In Malaysia, park and recreation planning has always been focused on the activities provided at the park and that the planning has been top down with administrators, planners, developers, and politicians playing key roles in deciding what to be provided (Marzuki, 2009; Wong, 1995). The top down approach in planning is known as rational comprehensive planning. Rational comprehensive planning process is a planning theory developed to provide a systematic reproducible process for identifying desired futures in planning and the pathways to them (McCool, 2009). The process is developed to remove politics from governmental decision making by having “neutral” experts process whereby by having the experts, the bias in decisions could be avoided (McCool & Patterson, 2000). The public is often welcomed to give inputs or consulted upon; however, the extent to whether their inputs are being considered or how extensive they are being consulted on the plan is not known. It is believed that the neglect of community rights in forestry and tourism planning has the potential towards inflicting negative attitudes and behaviours among the community, and has become a reason to cause social conflicts (Kusumanto & Sirait, 2010).

### ***2.1 Issues relating to protected area planning***

Protected area planning and management today occurs in a much challenging context. McCool (2009) described the context as change, complex and uncertain. The term ‘change’ inherently entails the rapid growth in travel to protected areas. Especially in places in Asia, are broadening with various socio-demographic profiles of visitors. Tourists are more eager to explore nature areas in this part of the world as places are regarded as pristine environment. Apart from that, the accelerating volume of tourists means, protected, area management are challenged to meet widening array of expectations on services and facilities as well as functions that these protected areas are expected to deliver. Protected areas are expected to provide ecosystem services such as clean air, pure water, play a role in alleviating poverty, provide recreational opportunities and serve as an engine for economic development (Abdullah, Yaman, & Jamaluddin, 1999; McCool, 2009; Plummer, 2009). Secondly, the context complex in a protected area’s planning means that planning often occurs in complex and non-linear situation (McCool & Patterson, 2000). It is much difficult to understand because, in a protected area planning it is hard to make predictions how small changes in one factor may lead to changes in another. In planning, action identified may be based on explicit assumptions. These assumptions may be question back giving lack of knowledge and understand on cause-effects of decisions.

This issue relating to participation practice in Malaysia is not new but certainly not enough researches have been conducted to explore its potential. It can be argued that the current situation with true participation practice in Malaysia is still under discussion. Apart from the Government’s initiatives made to incorporate public’s opinions in decision making process, true participation is still hardly to occur. Cheuk et al., (2010) mentioned that in Malaysia the public input is mere tokenism in nature. The public are being informed on what is going on in their communities and that is only it. Further consultation normally does not occur. Sharina, Hood, and Mustaffa (2011) and Dola and Dolbani (2006) further stressed that local community participation and public involvement in conservation moves in Malaysia, especially in resource management need urgent attention from all parties involved. Currently, the approach used by many government agencies in Malaysia is not proactive in ensuring true participation occurs especially at decision making process.

Thus, this research was conducted with aimed to determine the attributes that predict local community participation in planning for tourism in protected area, and the site chosen is Kuala Gandah, Pahang, Malaysia. In Kuala Gandah, tourism is seen as the important industry in the area. Especially, since the establishment of National Elephant Conservation Centre (NECC) as an ecotourism attraction by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC) and DWNP in 2000, the centre has received visitors and the numbers has keep rising. The centre was also recognized as ecotourism initiative under East Coast Economic Region (ECER) masterplan with plan to establish the centre as world class conservation site(Rahman, Hashim, Aziz, & Md Khalid, 2012). The attributes examined in this research will be reckoned to eventually affect local community participation especially at decision making process. Analysis will also able to allow for the strongest predictor of local community participation to emerge.

### **III. METHODOLOGY / MATERIALS**

#### ***3.1. Research approach***

A quantitative research accepts the fact that only observable phenomena (with an aid of instruments) can validly be warranted as knowledge in an attempt to translate natural science approaches into social sciences. Quantitative research as defined by Creswell (1994) is a type of research that is explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics). Quantitative research is based on testing theory, which composed of variables and are measured with numbers and later analyzed with statistical procedures.

While previous researches on factors and dimensions of public participation have utilized qualitative approach (McCool & Guthrie, 2001; Yaffee & Wondolleck, 2000), the current research took a different approach, to use both qualitative and quantitative methods. This is because looking at the nature of the present research inquiry, it was decided that the process of eliciting the relevant information for this study requires the use of a qualitative method at the beginning phase of data collection. The qualitative approach is appropriate to test the knowledge on dimensions of public participation as discussed in literatures by previous scholars and researchers from the relevant decision-makers and experts' view. The quantitative approach on is the best approach to identifying factors that influence an outcome (Creswell, 1994) which fits conveniently with the objectives of the present research.

#### ***3.2. Instrument development and sampling procedures***

The research employed a survey with a structured questionnaire. Structured questions are questions that offer the respondent a closed set of responses from which to choose. Structured questions, make data collection and analysis much simpler and they take less time to answer. The items were developed from previous studies conducted by (Dola & Dolbani, 2006; Gani, Awang, Mohamad, & Samdin, 2015; Marzuki, 2009). There were three sections consists of demographic, participation attributes and inclination to participate questions asked to the respondents. The respondents for the questionnaire survey were the people who have been at least consulted on the planning and development of tourism in the study site. These were the management and administration personnel in the Department of Orang Asli (JAKOA) office in Temerloh and DWNP Kuala Gandah, Pahang and the Village Development and Security Committee representatives. A total of 413 respondents were recorded during the two-weeks survey conducted at the site. A brief respondents' description is provided below.

Table 1: Respondents' description

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	273	66.1
Female	140	33.9
<b>Age</b>		
Less 35	210	50.8
35-40	54	13.1
40-45	34	8.2
45-50	35	8.5
50-55	41	9.1
55-60	23	5.6
60 and above	16	3.9
<b>Race</b>		
Malay	310	75.1
Chinese	34	8.2
Indian	4	1.0
Orang Asli	65	15.7

6.8% of the respondents were staff of DWNP while the remaining were villagers at the periphery areas of the site. They represent 93.2% of the respondents. The respondents were asked their number of times participating in any forms of local community participation for any planning efforts at the site. From the total, 85% of them have not participated in any forms of local community participation while the remaining of them (15%) have some experience in local community participation process. However, since the main part of the research were intended to predict the dimensions of public participation, thus findings from both of these groups were seen as equally important to extract the attributes that will work for this case site.

### 3.3. Statistical analysis

The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to test reliability, descriptive statistics while Exploratory Factor Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis were conducted to answer the objectives of the research.

## IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

40 attributes were examined and the results gave some insights on the perceptions among the key actors and local community on the importance of these attributes towards predicting success in public participation. There were not many noteworthy differences were observed from the data as the percentage values were similarly recorded among the group of respondents. Upon investigating on the attributes, it was found that the internal consistencies were within the acceptable range ( $>0.7$ ) decisions was made to conduct further analysis. Principal component analysis was conducted to determine the numbers of components exists in every key construct statistically. This was done to reduce the data by identifying the underlying dimensions that explain the correlations among the set of variables. 20 attributes retained from the analysis based on  $>0.5$  factor loading values. The attributes for all key constructs were later re-arranged based on their similarity and construct they represented. Each component was renamed for easy reference with careful cross check with the previous findings. The four components were renamed product, process – interest oriented, process – participant responsibility and situation specific.

None of the attributes revised after the component analysis was found to have any similarity to represent the key construct institutional context and human dimension as identified in the literature. Thus, these dimensions were removed from further analyses. In further analysis, process – interest oriented is referred to as process1 and participant responsibility is referred to as process2.

Table 2: Summary of exploratory factor analysis results

	Attributes	1	2	3	4
1	Fairness to all participants	.641			
2	Help build relationship	.680			
3	Ensure proper access for public	.721			
4	Ensure concerns being heard	.720			
5	Ensure input being reflected in document	.548			
6	Provision of funds and grants		.561		
7	Perceived legitimacy		.526		
8	Consider potential costs and benefits		.634		
9	Common visions		.620		
10	Shared sense of place		.737		
11	Respect among participants		.660		
12	Ensure input being reflected in document			.536	
13	Clearly explained outcome			.657	
14	Content easy to understand			.621	
15	Development plans well written			.764	
16	Development plans well implemented			.711	
17	Good interpersonal skills				.698
18	Involved as part of responsibility				.670
19	Sense of ownership				.635
20	Acknowledge unique social/ecological context				.514

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

By using the revised components, mean scores for each component were computed. Table 3 below shows the descriptive statistics for these key constructs and their revised components using statistical process. The components process 1 dimension, situation specific and product show a higher tendency of mean score used for attributes of public participation.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for revised components

Components	M	SE	Mdn	Mode	Var	SD
Process 1	4.1380	.02440	4.0000	4.00	.246	.49584
Situation specific	4.1860	.02197	4.1667	4.00	.199	.44646
Product	4.2678	.02231	4.2000	4.00	.205	.45331
Process 2	4.0720	.02599	4.0000	4.00	.279	.52814

#### 4.1 Significant predictors of local community participation

The results derived from previous analysis were later analysed to determine which of these dimensions are the most significant in predicting the public participation in tourism planning in Kuala Gandah. Based on the results for this study population (sample size = 413), two variables, situation specific dimension and process dimension were predictors for participation in Kuala Gandah. The results indicated that situation specific [ $F(1,411) = 142.99$   $p < 0.05$ ] contribute 25.8% in variance ( $R^2 = .258$ ) in participation. Thus, situation specific ( $\beta = .51$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was the main predictor of participation. Combination of situation specific ( $\beta = .38$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and process ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), added 5.2% to the variance ( $R^2 = .310$ ) in participation [ $F(2,410) = 91.90$   $p < 0.05$ ].

A model was formed to indicate the relationship between participation and each predictor. By replacing the values in equation derived from the SPSS results, the specific model can be defined as below;

$$\text{participation}_i = .712 + (.46\text{situationspecific}) + (.29\text{process1})$$

The positive values indicate a positive relationship between predictor and the outcome. Therefore, it can be concluded that as situation specific and process increases, participation is predicted to increase. The degree of each predictor affects the outcome is true if the effects of all predictors are held constant.

## V. CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that the local community in Kuala Gandah is keen to participate if the management of NECC place notable consideration on specific issues that are relevant to them.

The situation specific which addresses specific issues that are important in facilitating effective local community participation was found to be highly associated with participation by the community in Kuala Gandah. This implies that they demanded attention to specific issues by the management. Some of these claims include consideration on potential costs and benefits of the development towards the wellbeing of the community, acknowledgement of their legitimacy to participate and ensuring that everyone including the management are sharing the same visions. These are identified to be strongly associated with participation. The practice of local community participation need to recognize the community interests, able to instil respect among participants, which subsequently foster a sense of belonging which can motivate cooperative efforts. Importantly, mitigating fruitful participation would involve provision of funds and grants. While this could be an indication for the institutional context of participation, proper distribution of funds and grants in a community can be a very specific issue for the place and its community. The

local community need to realize that interdependence exists among them so they will have the sense of belonging to a situation. This can give them meaningful reasons to participate in planning and subsequently in coming up with decisions.

Nevertheless, the process dimensions with interest oriented is another dimensions that predicts participation of local community in Kuala Gandah. Process-interest oriented addresses that the management holds the responsibilities to facilitate a true and effective public participation. Therefore, the management of NECC needs to be well-organized in conducting participation process by acquiring qualified and trained personnel. Furthermore, it is important that NECC limits their influences in the decision making process to allow the public for more access to participate and encourage fair decisions. Fair decision making is important to secure support from the local community (Crosby, Janet, & Schaefer, 1986). Central to fair decision making is the need to be transparent in the process, where the public can see how the process is structured and how decisions are ratified.

The management of NECC needs to allow and give the public access to information so they would have the awareness of the tourism development which may have impact on them. Consequentially, this can instil a sense of belonging and build the relationship needed for collaborative efforts. Ominously, the public are concern about their influence on the decisions made. The participation process needs to allow for their points to be heard and considered which is critical since public participation is about building a space and creating conditions where the relevant parties can debate and express their disagreement prior to coming up with a resolution. The public's input should be acknowledged and must be made transparent and indicated in reports or documents. A well coordinate participation process must ensure equal rights and dignity of fellow participants with provision of good governance where the minority is given equal part in the planning community

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