

## Community Involvement in Culture and Nature Tourism in Sarawak

### Penglibatan Komuniti dalam Pelancongan Alam dan Budaya di Sarawak

SPENCER EMPADING SANGGIN

#### ABSTRAK

*Sebagai satu industri yang kian meningkat, industri pelancongan telah banyak menyumbang kepada pendapatan negara. Di Sarawak budaya tempatan telah lama menjadi daya tarikan pelancong ke Negeri Sarawak selain daripada tarikan pengembaraan dan alam semulajadi. Program pelancongan boleh membawa manfaat kepada penduduk tempatan dan agensi pelancongan serta memelihara alam sekitar sekiranya program tersebut dirancang dan dilaksanakan dengan betul. Namun begitu, terdapat beberapa isu yang perlu ditangani bagi menentukan industri pelancongan mapan di Sarawak. Kejayaan dan kemapanan ekopelancongan bergantung pada penglibatan dan kerjasama penduduk tempatan dalam perancangan dan pengurusan aktiviti-aktiviti pelancongan. Isi-isu ini dibincangkan secara mendalam dalam konteks kemapanan pembangunan industri pelancongan di Sarawak. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa, dari sudut pekerjaan, pelancongan memberi peluang pekerjaan, samada sepenuh masa atau separuh masa, kepada penduduk tempatan seperti dalam perkhidmatan pengangkutan sungai, pekerjaan di Taman Negara dan hotel (seperti di Mulu) selain dari mengadakan persembahan budaya, membuat dan menjual kraftangan. Kadar penglibatan penduduk tempatan dalam aktiviti pelancongan didapati tinggi dalam kalangan penduduk rumah panjang yang telah lama dikunjungi oleh pelancong. Selain itu, kerjasama di antara pihak agensi pelancongan dengan orang tempatan adalah memuaskan walaupun terdapat perbezaan mengikut lokasi. Justeru, komuniti yang telah lama terlibat dengan aktiviti pelancongan, secara amnya, memperolehi pendapatan yang lebih tinggi jika dibandingkan dengan komuniti destinasi pelancongan yang agak baru.*

*Kata kunci: Pelancongan, Sarawak, penglibatan komuniti, mapan, kerjasama*

## ABSTRACT

*Tourism has gained recognition as one of the fastest growing industry in Malaysia and generated substantial revenue to the country. In Sarawak local cultures have long been the main tourism attractions together with adventure, and lately the focus of tourism in Sarawak include nature. Tourism programs if properly planned and implemented can and should bring benefits not only to the tour operators and the local communities, but also helps to conserve the environment. Nevertheless, there are some essential issues that must be tackled in order to ensure the sustainability of tourism in Sarawak. The success and sustainability of ecotourism depends to a large extent on the participation and cooperation from the local people in the planning and management of tourism activities. This article explores these two vital issues within the context of sustainable tourism development in Sarawak. Studies indicated terms of employment, tourism generally provides both full-time as well as part-time employment for the local communities such providing river transportation and related services, and employment in the parks and hotels (as in the case of Mulu) in addition to providing cultural shows and performances as well as making and/or selling local handicrafts. The rate of local participation was higher among the more established tourism longhouses. Also, good but varied degree of cooperation exists between the local indigenous community and tour agencies. Consequently, the well-established tourism longhouses were generating more incomes through tourism when compared to the newly adopted longhouses.*

*Keywords: Tourism, Sarawak, community participation, sustainable, cooperation*

## INTRODUCTION

The significance of tourism to a country's economy is widely recognised throughout the world. Since 1992 tourism had emerged as the largest industry and largest employer in the world (Theobald 1994; Yamashita et al. 1997). In 1988 the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimated that the travel and tourism industry generated 231 million jobs (direct and indirect), or about one in every nine workers worldwide. This translates into US\$3.6 trillion of economic activity, and WTTC also projected that travel and tourism will grow to US\$8.0 trillion in terms of economic activity and will generate 328 million jobs by the year 2010 (Goeldner et al. 1999). World Tourism Organization (WTO) anticipates that there is little or no slowing down in the rate of expansion of international travels. In their *Tourism 2020 Vision*, WTO forecasts that international arrivals will reach 1 billion by 2010 and 1.6 billion by 2020 (WTO 1999).

It is not surprising that many developing countries have considered tourism as an alternative or complimentary development strategy and a possible solution for their economic malaise. Over the years tourism has gained its reputation as a crucial development agent and a perfect economic option to complement the traditional primary and secondary sectors. It is seen as a generator for significantly needed foreign exchange earnings and urgently needed capital for the economy of developing countries (Lea 1988). Many developing countries, therefore, have turned to tourism development as a means of attracting the necessary foreign exchange for inducing economic growth, generating employment, and ultimately increasing the local population's living standard. Policymakers in these developing countries often perceive the revenues from tourism as vital for improving local airports, roads, sewerage and other infrastructure (Urbanowicz 1989; Ioannides 1995).

Realising the increasing significance of tourism as a development strategy many Southeast Asian countries have turned tourism into one of the leading industries to generate foreign exchange earnings. Hitchcock et al. (1993) reported that the number of foreign visitors has doubled and receipts from tourism also increased, making tourism one of the leading sources of foreign exchange in 1990 in Thailand, second largest in the Philippines. In Singapore it is the third largest earner of foreign currencies, whilst in Indonesia tourism has moved into the fourth place, outstripping rubber and coffee as an earner of foreign exchange in 1990 (Hitchcock et al. 1993). As in other sub-regions in Asia, Southeast Asian nations will continue to have positive growth rate of international arrivals. WTO forecasts an average growth of 6.3 percent for international tourist arrivals in ASEAN from the year 1995 to 2020 (WTO 1999).

The phenomenal growth of tourism in Southeast Asia, as elsewhere in the developing world, has been associated with a number of factors and processes. Hitchcock et al. (1993) stated that there are three major factors that contribute to this growth. These factors are:

1. The increase in people's ability to afford to travel to the region. This may be attributed to two parallel factors: first, rising levels of affluence in the main source areas, and secondly, the steadily falling cost in real terms, of travel to the region;
2. The gradual shift in the 'centre of gravity' of mass tourism away from the longer-established destinations (in Europe, the Costa del Sol, the Algarve, the Cote d'Azur and the Aegean Island) towards the Far East and elsewhere is partly a reaction to the over-development of these major tourism centres; and
3. The changing consumer preferences - the search for something different, with the new natural and cultural environments placed high on tourists' lists of priorities.

In addition, active promotion campaigns by the various countries in Southeast Asia also contributed to this phenomenal growth. Malaysia, for example, in the 6<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan allocated a budget of RM534 million, almost four times the amount originally allocated in the 5<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan.

#### MALAYSIAN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Compare with many other countries in the region Malaysia is a relatively newcomer to the promotion of tourism. The Malaysian government now recognises the importance of tourism to economic growth, foreign exchange earnings, employment creation and regional development (Walton 1993). Although the Tourism Development Corporation (TDC) was established in Malaysia since 1972, it was not involved in the promotion of tourism in Malaysia not until the downturn of the nation's economy in the 1980s. With the realisation that tourism is going to be another major source of foreign exchange, in 1987 the government decided to establish the Ministry of Culture and Tourism with an intention of promoting Malaysian tourism at the international level. Consequently, TDC was also moved to the new Ministry and became the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board (popularly known as Tourism Malaysia). Its full focus is on promoting Malaysia domestically and internationally (Tourism Malaysia 2008). Walton (1993) noted that the campaign culminates in the highly successful Visit Malaysia Year in 1990 with over six million visitors recorded in that year alone. The impact of the aggressive promotional efforts has resulted in increased number of tourist arrivals in the later years. For instance, in the year 2000 the number of tourists recorded was 10.2 million, and in year 2008 the number visitors have almost doubled to 22.0 million (Tourism Malaysia 2008). Table 1 shows the number of tourist arrivals in Malaysia and the corresponding revenues for the last 10 years.

TABLE 1. Tourist Arrivals and Receipts to Malaysia

| Year | Arrivals<br>(million) | Receipts<br>(RM million) |
|------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 2008 | 22.0                  | 49,561.2                 |
| 2007 | 20.9                  | 46,070.0                 |
| 2006 | 17.45                 | 36,271.1                 |
| 2005 | 16.4                  | 31,954.1                 |
| 2004 | 15.7                  | 29,651.4                 |
| 2003 | 10.5                  | 21,291.1                 |
| 2002 | 13.2                  | 25,781.1                 |
| 2001 | 12.7                  | 24,221.5                 |
| 2000 | 10.2                  | 17,335.4                 |
| 1999 | 7.9                   | 12,321.2                 |

Source: Tourism Malaysia, 2008

Malaysia's Second Outline Perspective Plan 1991–2000 states that the prime strategy for the tourism sector is to create a distinct and unique image of the country's natural heritage and cultural resources (Government of Malaysia 1991). This strategy is to develop more new tourism products in their original and traditional settings, be it in town or rural areas, rather than to recreate the original products in an artificial and unnatural environment. Some of these products may be difficult to access. For example, tourism products like old lifestyles or natural beauty are located in the rural areas, or in the interior as the case of longhouse tourism in Sarawak. Therefore, the development of tourism products has given rise to the building of the various tourism-related infrastructures such as roads and airports. Concurrently it helps to improve the standard of living of the local indigenous population through access to better roads, efficient means of transportation and provision of related facilities especially in the rural areas. As such, tourism is an important means to bring sustainable development to the rural communities.

#### TOURISM AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF SARAWAK

Like in many other developing countries tourism industry is often associated with indigenous communities. Foreign tourists are interested to see and experience the lifestyles and cultures of the different indigenous communities. As such, the indigenous people's culture is one of the primary products, apart from the natural landscapes, that tourism industry is selling. In Sarawak, the establishment of longhouses and national parks as tourist destinations had directly or indirectly involved the indigenous people to participate in the state tourism industry. Tourism involving longhouses in Sarawak mainly focuses on the culture of the community and, to a lesser degree on, the environment within which the community is situated. The national parks, unlike the longhouses, offer a different kind of experience mainly associated with the natural environment, the adventure and appreciation of the existing flora and fauna. What is common to both is the local people who are involved in the tourism related activities. The participation of the people in the local community in the tourism activities is seen as crucial influencing factor to sustain both culture and nature tourism. In the context of this article, both longhouse tourism and national park tourism can be categorised as ecotourism. Although the main attraction in longhouse tourism is essentially the culture of the people, other related attractions, such as the natural environment within which the community is located and interacted with, have been gradually incorporated into the tour packages. According to The International Ecotourism Societies (TIES) ecotourism can be defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of the local people (Gaul 2003). Thus, it is difficult to separate culture from nature as both an essential components of the community. Indeed,

the combination of culture and nature into one tour package would offer visitors a chance to experience how indigenous people's culture is interacting with the natural environment.

In this article the author tries to examine the above issues by looking at two different tourism settings. The first setting is where tourism directly involves longhouse communities, particularly associated with local culture. The second one relates to nature tourism (also known as ecotourism) and how local communities are involved (or the lack of it).

### LONGHOUSE TOURISM IN SARAWAK

Longhouses have long been special features for tourism in Sarawak. These longhouses and their indigenous inhabitants are well known for their cultural attractions. Kedit (1990) reports that one of the earliest tourist destinations in Sarawak is an Iban community situated along the Skrang River, whose members were still living in their traditional lifestyle in longhouses, and observed aged-old beliefs and rituals. In this day and age, several Iban longhouses still remain as one of the main tourist attractions in Sarawak even though some structural changes have been made to many of the existing longhouses. For instance, in 1991 there were 16,456 tourists who went on package tours staying overnight at Iban longhouses (Zepple 1993). These adventure tours were formerly marketed as the "River Safari", and mainly focus on visits to Iban longhouses in the Sri Aman Division.

In Sarawak, the state government's continuous effort in bringing development to every part of Sarawak has resulted in more facilities being built - roads, airports and landing strips are built or improved. The development of these facilities consequently provides access to even the most remote areas in the interior, leading to the opening up of more longhouses or natural areas for tourism destinations. For example, in Batang Ai, Sri Aman, Sarawak, where longhouse tourism has been long established, the development of Batang Ai Hydroelectric Dam has brought along the development of facilities such as roads, electricity and treated water supply to the local longhouse communities below the dam. For communities which are located further up-river, above the dam, the Batang Ai Lake itself provides waterway that facilitates their travels. The travel distance to the nearest town had been shortened from what used to be a few days journey to just an hour boat rides. Similarly, the completion of a tar-sealed road that links Batang Ai Hydroelectric Dam to Kuching - Sri Aman road has made more longhouses in the Batang Ai area accessible, and thus able to draw tourists to visit them. Furthermore, the completion and operation of Hilton Batang Ai Longhouse Resort has also acted as a catalyst for further tourism development in this area. The resort provides a transit point for tourists to visit longhouses upriver without having to stay overnight in the longhouses

if they decide not to do so. A few of these Iban longhouses frequently visited by tourists are Nanga Ukom (Rh. Jarau), Nanga Spaya (Rh. Ugat) and Nanga Stamang (Rh. Sunok) on the Engkari River. Nanga Sumpa (Rh. Ngumbang) on the Delok River, Menyang Sedi on the Menyang River, and Nanga Beretik (Rh. Radin) and Wong Tibu (Rh. Endan) on the Upper Ai River are also frequented. Some of these longhouses were previously almost inaccessible (Jihen 2001).

In the Skrang River basin, located in Betong Division, many longhouses are destinations for tourists since the 1960s due to their close proximity to the main road connecting Sri Aman and Sibul. These Iban longhouses were among the first in Sarawak to receive tourists. These longhouses include Bunu, Mujan, Murat, Mejong, Tebat, Belaie, Sg. Pinang, Tabau and Panchor (Kedit and Sabang, 1994). However, since the opening of longhouse destinations in Lemanak and Batang Ai areas coupled with the recently completed Ulu Skrang road, the number of tourists visiting longhouses in the Skrang River has declined. Thus, better accessibility, such as road, does not necessarily guarantee more tourists arrivals. Journey to the longhouses that used to be by boat upriver (commonly known as 'River Safari') are now 'less interesting' and has been replaced by road transportation. In the past the long boat rides is an adventure that many tourists looked forward to and were usually included in the package for longhouse tourism along the upper Skrang River. But that have changed drastically. In fact, it is now widely acknowledged that a few of these longhouses have completely stopped receiving tourist visits. Mujan and Tebat are two examples.

#### TOURISM AND GUNUNG MULU NATIONAL PARK

Mount (Gunung) Mulu National Park, by contrast, has a different set of tourism assets. The main tourist attractions in the National Park are the natural caves, one of which is claimed to be the biggest natural cave in the world with the largest cave passage known to man. There are four caves that are open to the public in Gunung Mulu, each with its own unique attraction. These are the Lang's Cave (named after a Berawan man named Lang), Wind Cave, Clear Water Cave and, the biggest of all, the Deer Cave.

Gunung Mulu National Park is also an amusement for naturalists and adventurers who love jungle tracking and mountain climbing. Besides the caves, Mount Mulu National Park has other attractions including a serrated ridge of towering limestone peaks called the Pinnacles, and its rich fauna and flora. It has been claimed that there are over 1,500 species of plants thriving in the Mulu rainforest including the world's largest flower, *Rafflesia*. It is these natural landscapes and the rich flora and fauna that attract tourists to Gunung Mulu National park, many of whom are foreigners from Europe, Australia, the United States, Japan and many other countries.

The local indigenous people who reside in and around the vicinity of Mount Mulu National Park are mainly the ethnic Berawan and Penan communities. Of the two communities, the Penans are the ones living closer to the National Park. However, according to a study by Sanggin et al. (2000), the people's culture (the Berawan's and the Penan's alike) is of little significance in terms of tourist attraction. Most tourists visiting Mount Mulu National Park, if not all, would either stay at the Royal Mulu Resort or at other accommodations located in the Park, including some lodges located just outside the park itself. No home-stay programme was available in the Penan longhouses.

#### ISSUES OF CONCERN: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND COOPERATION

Tourism, no doubt, is a very important source of foreign earnings to the state and the nation. Nevertheless, there are some important issues that need to be carefully addressed in the pursuit of tourism development. Some of these issues are associated with the socio-economic well being of the local people in the tourism destinations. For instance, does tourism contribute to the well being of the local people? Do local people participate in tourism activities and if so, how and to what extent? Without some meaningful participation in the tourism activities the local people may not get any direct benefits from the industry. In theory, greater local participation in the tourism activities would ensure more social and economic benefits to the indigenous people. Local indigenous communities are normally the targets of tourism insofar as cultural tourism is concerned. And rightfully the local people deserves to be given fair opportunities to be involved in the tourism related activities, thereby increasing their earnings which could subsequently help to uplift their standard of living.

Other than local participation, the other related issue of concern is whether or not any forms of cooperation exist between the different parties involved in the tourism projects. The need for a meaningful cooperation is more glaring for longhouse tourism since it directly involves the local community and the tour agencies. The tour agents' role is basically to promote and bring in tourists whereas the local community's role is to receive the tourists. Tourists want to see and experience the culture of the local people, but without the cooperation from the indigenous people, longhouse tourism cannot be successfully implemented and sustained.

Ideally, closer and meaningful cooperation between local indigenous people and tour agencies should bring benefits to all parties concerned. A win-win situation is desirable and should be the key for sustainable longhouse tourism. For the local communities the number one concern is whether or not they can participate in any of the tourism activities and consequently gain economic benefits. The quality of life of the host community affected by tourism



development also needs to be taken into account. However the money earned by the local people from being employed in the tourism industry, does not necessarily ensure that their quality of life will improve. This is so because tourism can bring both positive and negative impacts to the host's quality of life. Therefore, it is a matter of concern not only for the local people and the tour agencies but also for policy makers that tourism activities in these longhouses truly bring both social and financial benefits to the longhouse communities.

Foreign tourists come to the tourism destinations through services provided by tour agencies. The tour agencies are normally located in the urban areas, and in the case of Sarawak, they are located mainly in Kuching, Miri and Sibiu. However, without the support and cooperation from the indigenous people the tour of the longhouses would not be possible. Local people are part and parcel of the tourism product. The culture and lifestyle of the community is an integral element of longhouse tourism. As observed by Zeppel (1993) in her study amongst the Iban longhouses, there are two main ways through which tourists can experience Iban culture. One way is through an Iban longhouse package tour of 'Cultural Sightseeing'. Another is through 'Meet the People' experience.

#### INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN TOURISM

Tourism developments bring changes to the local indigenous people and their environment. Tourism had created many job opportunities. It does not only create direct employment in the industries related directly to tourism such as hotels and shops, but also in other industries such as agriculture and handicraft. In the longhouses, local people (Iban) are either employed as host families, entertainers, boat drivers, helpers, porters, or as local guides. However, some of the employments are seasonal and often requiring low level of skill. It is often part-time rather than full-time employment (Prentice 1993).

One of the goals of longhouse tourism is to provide employment for the local people. Money spent by tourists should partially go to local residents who act as service and culture providers or managers. The question often asked in relation to the issue of employment is with regard to the form of employment created, the number of people involved and the kind of economic benefits the local people get. Below are some of the empirical findings and analyses in relation to the employment opportunities generated through longhouse and nature tourism and the degree of peoples' participation in the tourism activities in the two different settings.

#### LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN LONGHOUSE TOURISM

The findings of a study by Sanggin et al. (2000) reveal that more than 95 percent of the respondents in the Skrang and Batang-Ai area have been or are currently

involved in tourism related activities. Table 2 below shows the distribution of respondents in the Skrang-Batang Ai longhouses by their degree of participation in tourism related activities. As shown, the respondents' degree of participation in tourism activities was generally high. More than 70 percent of the respondents indicated that they are most often involved in activities such as tourist's welcoming ceremony/procession, traditional music demonstration and cultural performances. Other activities that involved the respondents on a moderate scale include performing the traditional dance, acting as tour guides, making and selling handicrafts, serving as boat driver, assistant boat driver, and as an assistant at tourist lodge. In all of the activities arrangements are made between the tour agencies and representatives of the longhouse communities. The rate of charges for activities performed is agreed upon by both parties. What is unknown is the proportion of payments made by the tourists to the local people because the ones who actually make the payments are the tour guides.

The normal practice had been for families to rotate their participation in most of the tourism-related activities. Every family in the longhouse is encouraged to participate when and wherever possible. For example, when their turn comes a representative(s) from a family will join the other representatives from a few other families to take part in the activities that had been planned and agreed upon prior to the arrival of tourists to the longhouse, or when requested by the tourists or tour agent. For handicraft sales anybody can participate at anytime they want. In fact, most of the handicrafts were hanged on the walls along the corridors of the longhouses which are visited by tourists.

TABLE 2. Distribution of Respondents in Skrang and Batang Ai by Degree of Participation in Tourism Activities

| Types of activities          | Percentage of Respondents by Degree of Participation*<br>(N = 239) |      |      |      |      |
|------------------------------|--|------|------|------|------|
|                              | 1  | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    |
| Welcome procession           | 7.9  | 8.8  | 21.8 | 27.6 | 33.9 |
| Playing traditional music    | 15.1   | 13.0 | 16.7 | 21.8 | 33.5 |
| Cultural Performance /show   | 14.6   | 6.7  | 17.6 | 24.3 | 36.8 |
| Traditional Dance            | 34.7   | 9.6  | 12.1 | 20.5 | 23.0 |
| Host family                  | 68.2   | 7.1  | 4.6  | 12.6 | 7.5  |
| Local tour guide             | 36.8   | 9.2  | 16.3 | 20.9 | 16.7 |
| Making & selling handicrafts | 15.1   | 9.2  | 13.0 | 28.5 | 34.3 |
| Boat Driver                  | 33.5   | 7.9  | 15.9 | 19.7 | 23.0 |
| Boat Driver's Assistant      | 35.6   | 10.5 | 18.4 | 13.0 | 22.6 |
| Helper at tourist's lodge    | 27.6   | 12.1 | 17.2 | 18.4 | 24.7 |
| Collecting local vegetables  | 36.0   | 13.4 | 16.7 | 18.8 | 14.2 |

\* Degree of Participation 1 = Never  
4 = Quite often  
2 = Very seldom  
5 = Always  
3 = Sometimes

Source: Sanggin, et al. 2000

Nevertheless, nearly all of the longhouse residents who participated in the tourism activities still considered their involvement as a part-time job. Their main economic activity remains mainly subsistence agriculture such as rice farming. Besides that the Ibans in Skrang and Batang Ai also plant (on a small-scale) commercial crops like pepper and rubber. It is estimated that income from agriculture (cash and kind) still accounted for about 80 percent of their family income.

#### LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN NATURE TOURISM - MOUNT MULU NATIONAL PARK

By contrast, the situations are slightly different in the Mulu National Park where the focus is on nature tourism. Local people, especially the Berawans, are mostly employed either by the Park Management or work in the Royal Mulu Resort. Others become boat drivers, tour guides and porters. A few enterprising individuals are involved in small businesses such as operating a canteen and/or a karaoke pub and transporting tourists by boat to the caves.

Unlike the Berawans, the Penans, on the other hand, are less involved in the tourism activities. According to an official of Mulu National Park, some Penans were offered jobs by the Park Management but few accepted the offer. Those who did also did not last long. They seemed to have difficulties trying to adapt to the formal work environment. They prefer to go back to their longhouses and carryout their normal activities of hunting and to some extent, doing subsistence farming. Part of the reason why this happened is that most of the Penans are uneducated compared to the Berawans, many of whom are well-educated at the secondary school level and a few had attended college education). Only a handful of the younger Penans had attended primary school education. Therefore, their participation, as far as tourism is concerned, is very much limited to activities such as selling few handicrafts, which are often seen displayed along the corridors or hung on the walls of their longhouses. Occasionally tourists take their pictures for which they are paid some nominal fees.

Based on the case study by Sanggin et al. (2000), it is evident that tourism is an industry that can help provide employment for many of the rural indigenous population who otherwise are unemployed or underemployed. The fact that local people are employed in the tourism industry, either directly or indirectly, mean that their income level also increases, thereby improving their living standard. However, the rate of participation is influenced by several factors such as the focus of tourism, whether it is cultural or nature-based, their level of education, and their familiarity with the formal environment.

One other critical but often neglected aspect of indigenous people's participation in the tourism industry is planning. In this respect the Iban longhouse communities, which are involved in tourism are often excluded when it comes to

tourism planning and are ignorant regarding the economic benefits of tourism to the community. Pearce (1994) argues that the indigenous community may not be experts in tourism planning but their rights to give comments on the proposal should not be ignored. Archer & Cooper (1994), as quoted in Sanggin et al. (2000), noted that there has been too little attention given to the wishes of the local population. Decisions related to tourism planning are too often made by politicians and planners in terms of their perceptions of national interest rather than that of local interest. Field observations revealed that the level of participation was not only low but the numbers of people involved were very few. Those who were usually involved mainly comprised of the longhouse headmen (Tuai Rumah) or their representatives. Other longhouse members were either not consulted or refused to be involved in the planning process.

Through tourism local people will also be exposed to other cultures, many of which are socially fine for the local people themselves. Of course there are possibilities of unwanted foreign cultures that may infiltrate into the local community. Tourism involves an interactive process between host and guest and therefore the culture of the host community is very much at risk (Sofield, 1991: 56). However, findings by Sanggin et al. (2000) did not indicate any significant cultural changes as a result of local people's participation in tourism activities. There is a concern, however, that tourists expect to see a display of local culture for which they pay for. Because of this "many local cultures may actively construct what appears to be an authentic cultural display but which in reality is a staged event specifically for tourists' consumption" (Wearing & Neil 2000: 76). Commodification of culture of this nature is often viewed as a positive impact of tourism. In fact, tourism helps to promote the practice of many traditional cultures, which are otherwise forgotten by the younger generation. This conforms to the findings by Pearce et al. (1996) that tourism increased pride of the local people in their traditional culture.

#### COOPERATION BETWEEN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND THE TOUR AGENCIES

The participation of the indigenous people, the Iban longhouse community in particular, in tourism related activities started more than 30 years ago. One important factor that contributes to the sustainability of longhouse tourism in Sarawak is the close cooperation that exists between the tour operators and the longhouse community. In fact, the level and nature of local participation also depends very much on the nature and degree of cooperation between the longhouse community and the tour agency. The better the cooperation is between the two parties, the higher would be the level of participation by the local people in the tourism activities. On the other hand, the lack of involvement, particularly in decision-making relating to tourism can cause a lot of dissatisfaction on the part of the host communities.

The longhouse community is the product that the tour operators seek to promote and sell to both domestic and international tourists. For the tour operators, more tourists would mean more business (and therefore income) for them. For the local (host) community, this inadvertently will also bring more income to the people in the participating longhouses, even though the proportion of income that goes to the local people is rather small compared to what the tour agency gets. Nevertheless, based on a study by Sanggin et al. (2000), local people are not so concerned about the disparate distribution of benefits generated from tourism as they understand that without the support of the tour agencies in bringing tourists to their longhouses they cannot get the extra income (mostly cash) from tourism related activities. Most of the people interviewed express their satisfaction with the money gained from their involvement in the tourism activities. This kind of understanding between the host community and the tour operators is believed to be the underlying factor that determines the future of both culture and nature tourism.

For longhouse tourism, the Ibans (indigenous people of Sarawak) is one of the major tourist products in Sarawak with emphasis on traditional costumes, longboat rides, longhouses, skulls, etc. as the promotional focus. Providing good services to the tourists while they stay in the longhouse is a necessity to ensure sustainability of longhouse tourism. The longhouse community will have to entertain the tourists during their stay in the longhouses, such as the presentation of cultural performances, a taste of Iban local rice wine called *Tuak*, as well as sharing their lifestyles with the tourists as most of the visits are arranged on a home-stay basis.

The process of cooperation normally starts with the identification of a longhouse that has potential for tourism. The tour operators then may sign a contract with the longhouse community to make use of the longhouse for tourism activities for a certain period of time. After signing the contract, the tour operators will do the promotion and then bring tourists to the respective longhouses. It is only at this point that the local people start to participate in the process. One longhouse is normally contracted out to one tour agency indicating that there is an element of monopoly by the tour operator because he does not have to compete with other tour operators once the deal is completed. Unfortunately this may turn out to be a disadvantage to the local community particularly when the tour operators representing the tour agency refuse to entertain their requests such as to revise and increase the payment rates for each activity performed by the local participants.

'Signing' of contract is often done between the tour operators and selected individuals (normally the headman such as Tuai Rumah and influential individuals of in the longhouses). Those individuals presumably will act as representatives for the community. In other longhouses, particularly in the more established tourism longhouse, the residents set up a committee that specifically plans for tourism-related activities. The committee works closely with the tour operators.

For instance, the tour operators will inform the committee when tourists are coming (as well as the number of tourists who will come) to visit their longhouse. Once this information is known the longhouse committee members will decide on the number of people from the longhouse who should be involved for a particular group of tourists. The committee is also responsible for negotiating the payment rates with the tour operators. They also keep account of the money paid by the tour operators and later distribute the money among the participants accordingly.

In some cases the longhouse community, on a joint venture basis with the tour operators, participates in the construction of a lodge for tourists to stay, that is, if the tourists are not staying with a host family in the longhouse. In building a lodge, the longhouse community provides labour and land whereas the tour operator provides the building materials. Examples of these lodges can be seen in Nanga Stamang and Nanga Sumpa.

Both parties should benefit from the close cooperation between tour operators and the Iban longhouse community. For example, the tour operators consider the longhouse as a product that they could sell in the tourism business. On the other hand, the longhouse communities will benefit through employment (albeit part-time) in the tourism activities and thereby increases their level of income and eventually improve their living standard. Therefore, the symbiotic relationship between the indigenous people and the tour operators brings positive outcomes to both parties, although some may argue that the local people are always at the mercy of the tour operators. However one must not forget that without the efforts made by the tour operators (which usually involved costs) there will probably be no tourist coming to the longhouse.

Caslake (1993) and Kedit & Sabang (1994) indicate that there is no direct monetary exchange between the tourists and the Ibans. Caslake cites a case where the tour company signed a two-year contract with the longhouse people, giving them the sole use of the longhouse and facilities. Even in activities such as jungle trekking, fishing and demonstration on the use of blowpipe, the persons involved are paid directly by the tour guide/agent (who is employed by the tour company). Thus, he concluded that the longhouse community in actual fact 'worked' for the tour company.

Thus, greater cooperation between the tour operators and the local community as well as meaningful participation of the indigenous people themselves is needed in order to sustain tourism in the longhouse. A few of the local people, however, expressed a little bit of dissatisfaction with the rates that the tour operators pay them for their cultural performances such as the *ngajat*. According to Dias (2001), despite the formation of Tourism Committee, as in the case of Benuk, a Bidayuh longhouse, the community is still heavily dependent on outsiders to bring in tourists and act as guides. This may be one reason why some residents are unhappy with the share of income from tourism. Unless a better and formal agreement is made between the two parties, the host community

will continue to be on the losing end. This is where it is felt that the government should intervene and play its role to ensure that a win-win situation for both parties. Dias (2001) findings also indicate that the local people's attitudes toward the role of the state government were highly uniform, that is, the Sarawak State Government should be responsible for organising promotional campaigns not only to encourage visitation to Sarawak but also to the longhouse.

### CONCLUSION

Tourism is still a growing industry in Sarawak. There are a lot more that the state can do to improve the tourism industry. While efforts are being made to tap into other potential tourism spots, the relevant authority should not forget to improve the existing ones. At the same time, there are important issues that need to be resolved. These include the need to continuously assess level of host community's participation, the impact of tourism on the lives of the local people involved, and most of all the need to maintain greater cooperation between the host community and the tour operators.

Tourism, no doubt, has immense potentials both for the state of Sarawak as well as for its indigenous people and tour operators who are directly involved in the industry. In terms of employment, tourism generally provides both full-time as well as part-time employment for the local communities. Furthermore, in the past local people in the participating longhouses are mainly service and culture providers rather than "managers". This is perhaps an area where improvements should be made. Local people ought to be confident that they are capable of managing tourism activities in their area. Presently, the participation of the local people is generally confined to providing river transportation and related services, and employment in the parks and hotels (as in the case of Mulu) in addition to providing cultural shows and performances as well as making and/or selling local handicrafts. However, with proper training and long years of experience in the tourism industry these local indigenous people should be able manage part, if not all, of the tourism activities involving the host community.

Some degree of cooperation exists between the local indigenous community and tour agencies. However, the nature and rate of cooperation varies between locations. In the more established tourism longhouses cooperation between the operators and the local residents seems to be better as compared to the newly adopted longhouses. Similarly, when analysed from the aspect of economic benefits the well-established tourism longhouses are doing better than the newly adopted longhouses. The level of participation of the local people amongst the well-established tourism longhouses in tourism related activities was also found to be significantly higher when compared with the newly established tourism longhouses. Nevertheless, contracts and agreements between tour operators and local indigenous people have to be reviewed from time to time in view of the

changes in terms of cost and time that both parties spent on tourism activities. On the other hand the government can play a more active role not only in promoting longhouse tourism but it should also look into ways that the local communities can gain more from their participation in the tourism activities. Meaningful participation and cooperation are essential factors in the sustainability of longhouse tourism specifically, and any eco-tourism involving indigenous community in general.

## REFERENCES

- Archer, B. & Cooper, C. 1994. Positive and Negative Impacts of Tourism. In *Global Tourism: The Next Decade*, Theobald, W.F. (ed.). Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Caslake, J. 1993. Tourism, Culture and the Iban. In *Tourism in Borneo: Issues and Perspectives*, King, V.T. (ed.). Proceedings Number Four, 69-90. Williamsburg, Virginia: Borneo research Council.
- Dias, T. 2001. Tourism and Longhouse Communities. IEAS working paper. Institute for East Asian Studies, UNIMAS, Kota Samarahan.
- Goeldner, C.R., Brent Ritchie, J.R. & McIntosh, R.W. 1999. *Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies*. 8<sup>th</sup> Ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Government of Malaysia. 1991. *Sixth Malaysia Plan 1991-1995*. Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Berhad.
- Hitchcock, M., King, V. T. & Parnwell, M.J.G. 1993. *Tourism in South-East Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Ioannides, D. 1995. Planning for International Tourism in Less Developed Countries: Toward Sustainability? *Journal of Planning Literature* 9(3): 235-258.
- Jihen, B. 2001. Socioeconomic Impacts of Longhouse Tourism on Local Communities: A Case Study of Selected Longhouse Communities in the Ai, Engkari and Skrang River Systems, Sri Aman Division, Sarawak: Unpublished thesis UNIMAS.
- Kedit, P.M. 1990. Museum and Tourism. *Sarawak Museum Journal* 41(62): 219- 225.
- \_\_\_\_\_. & Sabang, C.L. 1994. Tourism Report: A Re-Study of Skrang Longhouse Tourism. In *Tourism in Borneo: Issues and Perspectives*, King V.T. (ed.). Proceedings Number Four, 59-66. Williamsburg, Virginia: Borneo Research Council.
- Lea, J. 1988. *Tourism and Development in the Third World*. London: Routledge.
- Pearce, P.L. 1994. Tourist-Resident Impacts: Examples, Explanations and Emerging Solutions. In *Global Tourism : The Next Decade*, Theobald, W.F. (ed.). Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd. Oxford.
- Pearce, P.L., Moscardo, G. & Ross, G. 1996. *Tourism Community Relationships*. Pergamon: Oxford.
- Prentice, R. 1993. *Tourism and Heritage Attractions*. London: Routledge.
- Sanggin, S.E., Abdullah, A.R., Noweg, G.T. & Mersat, N.I. 2000. Impact of Tourism on Longhouse Communities in Sarawak. *Borneo 2000: Language, Management and Tourism*. Proceedings from the Sixth Biennial Borneo Research Conference, Institute for East Asian Studies, UNIMAS, Kota Samarahan.
- Sofield, T.H.B. 1991. Sustainable Ethnic Tourism in South Pacific: Some Principles. *Journal of Tourism Studies* 291: 56-72.
- Theobald, W.F. 1994. *Global Tourism: The Next Decade*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd.



- Tourism Malaysia. 2008. <http://www.tourism.gov/corporate/aboutus.asp>.
- Urbanowicz, C.F. 1989. Tourism in Tonga Revisited: Continued Troubled Times. In *Hosts and Guests*, Smith, V.L. (ed.). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Walton, J. 1992. Economics of Tourism in Malaysia, with Special Reference to East Malaysia. In *Tourism in Borneo*, King, V.T. (ed.). Kota Kinabalu: Borneo Research Council.
- Wearing, S. & Neil, J. 2000. *Ecotourism: Impacts, Potentials and Possibilities*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann
- World Tourism Organization. 1999. *Tourism Vision 2020: Executive Summary Updated*. Madrid: World Tourism Organization.
- Yamashita, S., Eades, J.S. & K.H. Din. 1997. Introduction: Tourism and Cultural development in Asia and Oceania. In *Tourism and Cultural Development in Asia and Oceania*, Yamashita, S., Eades, J.S. & Din, K. H. (eds.). Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Zeppel, H. 1993. Getting to Know the Iban: The Tourist Experience of Visiting an Iban Longhouse in Sarawak. In *Tourism in Borneo*, King, V.T. (ed.). Kota Kinabalu: Borneo Research Council.

Spencer Empading Sanggin, Ph.D  
Faculty of Social Science  
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak  
94300 Kota Samarahan  
Sarawak  
Malaysia