SCALING UP SMALL SCALE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SUSTAINABILITY CERTIFICATION : A CASE STUDY OF PULAU PERHENTIAN KECHIL, TERENGGANU

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ABSTRACT

Since the past few years, sustainability certification has been utilized as an instrumental tool for natural environment protection by the tourism industry in developed nations. In Malaysia, it is still newly introduced and has not been widely practiced especially for scaling up the small scale tourism development. Thus, a research was undertaken to examine the potential application of sustainability certification towards sustainable development of small scale tourism in the country. This paper discusses the approach, challenges and constraints in relation to sustainability certification development and implementation as well as factors which define its success. The implementation framework is also proposed using Pulau Perhentian Kechil as the model.

Keywords: sustainability certification, small scale tourism, community-based tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the world’s largest and fastest growing industries which contributes to the development and economic enhancement of a country as well as generates employment opportunities, especially in a developing country like Malaysia. The Malaysian tourism industry has also rapidly expanded in line with the world tourism trend. Currently, Malaysia is the 9th most visited country in the world (PEMANDU, 2010). With multiple efforts in upgrading the standard of attraction sites and tourism facilities, as well as a variety of events and festivals, Malaysia was able to increase tourist arrivals to the country to 24.6 million in 2010 and targets to receive 36 million tourist arrivals by the year of 2020 (PEMANDU, 2010).

Owing to the strong growth of the industry, there is a possibility that Malaysia will also encounter problems in terms of degradation of major tourist attractions resources if efforts are not taken to monitor and conserve the attraction areas especially those which are nature-based. Thus the desire toward achieving sustainable tourism as emphasised in the National Tourism Policy (MOCAT, 1992) will not be realised. Accordingly, small scale tourism activities mostly operated in rural areas and islands (UNSD, 2001), should also be given due attention and needs proper and integrated planning so that they comply with the fundamental principles of sustainability.

At present, the sustainable tourism approach has been incorporated into the national tourism sector development in line with the awareness towards the need to conserve the natural resources. It was done using the command and control instruments, (UNEP, 2006) which are through the policy, strategies in the 5-year Malaysia Plan, Ecotourism Master Plan (MOCAT,1997), National Tourism Policy (MOCAT,
Tourism certification is seen to possess huge potential to be applied for the purpose of control and monitoring of small scale tourism activities. Basically, it benefits both the stakeholders and the government (Sasidharan et al., 2002). The government would be able to achieve sustainable tourism while the small scale stakeholders could use it as a medium to promote their businesses. Certification can be used to increase the sale of the small scale tourism products and services by certifying them under local or regional schemes that will help enhance market recognition through the guaranteed quality standard (Woodland and Acott, 2007).

The initiative of using certification in realising sustainable tourism especially for the small scale is one that has not been extensively explored even though it has a huge potential for implementation in Malaysia (MOCAT, 1997; Vikneswaran et al., 2003). Nevertheless, its success and contributions to sustainability in small scale tourism in many countries have been proven (Font, 2002; Buckley, 2002; Honey and Bien, 2005; Yunis, 2004). One example of the best practice in scaling up small scale tourism using sustainability certification is the Sustainable Tourism Certification Program in Costa Rica. The Costa Rica Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program developed by the Costa Rican Tourist Board was recognised as world’s best practice and was referred as a model for the development of other small scale tourism certification programs (Honey and Bien, 2005:7).

However, there are many issues that need to be given due attention before the sustainability certification approach can be implemented or introduced into the existing small scale tourism discipline in Malaysia. As argued by Font (2002) and UNWTO (2003), the tourism certification used in a particular country and for a certain group may not be suitable for application in other localities due to the diverse geographical, political, socio-economic and sectoral characteristics of every country. Also, certification programs designed for the large-scale would not be appropriate for small scale tourism activities. The high cost of participation and implementation (Grodsky, 1993; Bien, 2001; Honey and Rome, 2001; Sasidharan et al., 2002), for instance, may keep away the small scale stakeholders. Also, among the main issues would be the readiness of the small scale tourism stakeholders to adopt and accept the approach, their perception and understanding on the role of tourism certification and which party should be the leading agency.

Thus, a study was undertaken with the aim to determine the potential application of sustainability certification as a means to achieve the sustainable development of small scale tourism in Malaysia. This aim was achieved through three objectives; review of the sustainability certification approach and the implementation in the context of small scale tourism environment; examination of the understanding and acceptance of sustainability certification from the perspective of small scale operators; and recommending a practical framework for the development of sustainability certification for small scale operators.

**RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

Initial study of the sustainable tourism literature indicated that several gaps existed in relation to tourism certification development and implementation. One of these gaps was the lack of research on sustainability certification program for the small scale tourism operators either in term of involvement, their understanding or the suitable standard/ criteria created for this group. Another gap was that little attention has been given to island small scale tourism operators which rely on natural resources and the issues of sustainability. Thus this research has set out to achieve its aims and address identified gaps in the literature through a case study approach, focusing on small scale tourism activities on the island of Pulau Perhentian Kechil in Terengganu, Malaysia.

**An Empirical Study of Sustainability Certification and The Implications on The Small Scale Tourism Development**

Much debate has taken place over the potential and merits of certification as ‘a tool to help attain the sustainability principles’ (Diamantis, 2004:90). Over the last decade, programs to certify environmental
performance and activity have been introduced within the tourism industry, mainly in Europe and linked to accommodation provision, with more recent efforts to certify ecotourism in southern hemisphere countries. In a recent report published by World Tourism Organisation (2002), on voluntary initiatives in sustainable tourism and ecotourism, some 104 programmes were identified, ranging from detailed and complex systems that demonstrate environmental performance, to those used merely as a promotional umbrella such as awards. In all, some 59 programs globally could be classified as certification programs, although only a handful of these are specifically designed for ecotourism. In 2000 to 2001, World Tourism Organisation commissioned a global study on voluntary initiatives for sustainable tourism. More than 100 ecolabels, awards and self committing initiatives were studied in the first comparative analysis worldwide to assess the history, development, objective, requirements, procedures and effectiveness of every initiative (Hamele, 2004).

It is argued here and indeed, the role of thumb for many certification researchers and practitioners in Europe is that the set of criteria for “better environmental performance” has to both go beyond what is required by law (national or regional) and still be achievable by 10 to 30 percent of the target group of tourism providers. This is more straightforward for certification programs for which the target group is very specific – tourism on organic farms for instance. It becomes a greater challenge when the target group is the accommodation industry in general, ranging from urban hotels to seaside resorts to bungalows, guest houses and alpine huts. This can lead to less rigorous, more generalised performance criteria and the use of criteria based on process or environmental management systems (Hamele, 2004).

The lack of methods to enforce sustainable management and regulate green messages in tourism has lead to an increasing number of voluntary initiatives in the form of codes of conduct, manuals, awards and certifications and ecolabels. To date, academic debate has largely discussed on the effectiveness and also gap that exist in the current voluntary initiatives in the aspects of its scope, criteria and standard applied, effectiveness in achieving the sustainability objective and contribution, particularly to small and medium scale tourism business.

There is a need to create regional platforms to disseminate information about certification and to address key issues, such as the participation of small and medium sized and community based certification operations, financial sustainability, marketing, monitoring and evaluation and accreditation. And the question becomes, ‘how do you successfully design and market a unified tourism certification program platform?’ (Boulden et al., 2003).

The lack of information regarding the benefits, costs or how the scheme is applied as well as inadequate facilities to enable small and medium sized enterprises to access or refer for choosing the suitable scheme for their businesses have hinder them from participating in the certification schemes that exist. Also, most tourism ecolabelling schemes are prone to be plagued by greater involvement from large scale enterprises of the public sector working towards the development of environmental standards that best suit their business interest. As such, the fear of failing to meet the set standards would discourage most small-scale enterprises from participating in the initiation phase of any program (Sasidharan et al., 2002). Similarly, Grodsky (1993) and Sasidharan et al. (2002) argue, the high costs of operating environmentally sensitive tourism projects are often affordable only to large-scale, multinational enterprises. Whilst, the tourism industry mainly comprises smaller agencies such as privately owned, small-scale tour operators, travel agents, lodges and hotels, usually lacking the financial capability to provide eco-friendly tourism services and to support the high start-up and compliance monitoring costs associated with the application for tourism certification. Additionally, high licensing fees are charged by the tourism certification agency for permitting tourism enterprises to use the awarded certificates in their marketing efforts, the future tightening of criteria, the possibility of non-recertification due to unsatisfactory standards, and the costs associated with recertification after one to three year (Sasidharan et al., 2002). Apparently, very few small-scale tourism enterprises would be capable of meeting the strong criteria and standards developed by certification schemes. The resource either in terms of personnel or financial, as well as inadequacy and incapability of most small scale tourism enterprises to meet the stringent standards and criteria set by the program would discourage them from participating in tourism certification program. For example, according to a study by the Pacific Institute (Honey & Rome, 2001), ‘the financial costs for attaining certification from ISO 14001, a program which promotes improved environmental performance, are
usually high ranging from $500 to $15,000 and affordable only to the largest hotels’. This excessive cost may restrict market access for small scale stakeholders especially in the developing countries.

The Study Site

Pulau Perhentian Kechil is one of the islands located in the Terengganu State and is about 21km off the Terengganu coast in South China Sea at the east coast of Malaysia. The island is situated close to the west of Pulau Perhentian Besar, which is also a popular tourism destination (Figure 1). Pulau Perhentian Kechil is one of the primary pilot model areas that are given priority in the Rural Tourism Master Plan (RTMP) implementation for Terengganu. Geographically, it is positioned at the latitude of 5° 55’ 1” North of the Equator and longitude of 182° 43’ 58” East of the Prime Median on the World map. The land area of this island is 1,418 acres (5.74 sq. km) with the total population of 1,300 persons, where majority are involved in tourism activities. Kampung Pasir Hantu is the only village in Pulau Perhentian Kechil. Located at the north-eastern part of the island, it is a fishing village equipped with several facilities including the police station, post office, health-care centre, mosque, jetty, and shops.

Figure 1 : Pulau Perhentian

Generally, tourism activities in Pulau Perhentian are concentrated at the snorkelling and scuba diving activities. However, the island which is still rich with natural beauties also offers other attractive activities like nature walk, deep sea fishing, canoeing, and beach sport (Figure 2).

Pulau Perhentian Kechil is a good example of a locally-led tourism development in small islands. Accommodation such as chalets or small beach restaurants are locally owned and operated in small scale where chalets and rooms provide basic facilities such as beds, toilets and mosquito nets. Some chalets provide fans, and due to demands, there are also chalets equipped with air conditioning. In total, there are 18 tourism accommodation facilities where 13 are chalets operated by small scale operators, while 5 more are resorts. The overall number of rooms offered by the chalets and resorts are 501. The rooms available from the resort type accommodations are equipped with 24 hours electricity supply, offer air conditioning and provide facilities like internet, laundry services, hot and cold shower, and television. The typical room rate is between RM160 and RM350 per night. In contrast, most of the accommodations in the form of chalets and dormitories provide basic facilities such as 12 hours of electricity supply and beds, apart from an attached bathroom for a chalet unit and separate bathroom for a dormitory unit. The facilities provided are equivalent to the low room charge of RM25 to RM110 per night.
Research Methodology

The study has used the mix method in which the quantitative method was used to obtain information from the small scale stakeholders involving their profiles and understanding of sustainability tourism. On the other hand, the qualitative method (interviews) was used to gather information concerning the issues, potentials and constraints of the tourism certification implementation. Two separate questionnaires were designed for small scale operators, which are divided into 2 groups. The accommodation operators group refers to chalet owner whereas service operators group consists of boat operators, travel agencies, scuba instructors and tourist guides.

The rationale to the choice of methods is that respondents among the chalet operators gave more response through the use of structured questionnaire as the method for data gathering. This is because it facilitates them in understanding the requirement of the study as the term tourism certification used is not something familiar to them. Besides, the interview method used by researcher while in the process of selecting an appropriate method for data gathering (pilot survey) has returned poor responds and produced outputs that could not fulfil the needs of the research. Therefore, researcher had resolved to using questionnaire in the study. However, despite using the method, researcher while conducting the face to face interviews had also need to frequently provide explanation on the questions’ requirement so that respondents can give the appropriate answers.

Whereas the application of in depth interviews to determine the potentials, issues and constraints was for respondents representing the small scale tourism operators, the head of community and government agencies with concerns in the development of the tourism sector in the study area. This method is seen more effective in obtaining the research findings where most respondents will give their views based on their knowledge and experiences. The method is found to produce more realistic data (Bell, 1992; Berg, 2004; Bert et al., (2005); Newman, 2006). In addition, the triangulation approach was also applied in eliciting the empirical data using the methods of questionnaire survey and in-depth interview. Triangulation between the research findings from questionnaire, interviews, observations and literature review has provided clearer views of a particular issue discussed. Based on this study, researcher is of the opinion that qualitative and quantitative approach can be integrated to produce more reliable results. This is due to the advantage of the quantitative approach in term of presentation of measurable and assessable facts. On the other hand, the qualitative approach allows for the display of uncountable characteristics and features.

Understanding The Operators’ Business Approach

In order to comprehend how sustainability certification can play the role as a mechanism for scaling up small scale tourism development in Pulau Perhentian Kechil, the study had first attempted to understand the model or approach adopted by the operators. There are two groups of accommodation stakeholders in Pulau Perhentian Kechil which are the small scale operators that run chalets, and the resort operators. Even though the research focus is on small scale operators, the existence of resorts in the study area was also taken into consideration since it contributes to the scenario, and trend of tourism activities. At the same time, the diversity of tourism operators has created various business models, particularly in terms of their targets and market segments.
As shown in Figure 3, the market segment of small scale chalet operators is more focused on individual and small group tourists. They practised the ‘walk in’ system instead of reservation and have chosen to maintain their existing method of small scale and informal business operation while targeting at the repeat tourists which they considered as more sustainable in terms of income earning. This is because since the development of tourism activities here, it has focused on a particular group of tourists such as the backpackers and eco-tourists who carry out the activities of scuba diving and those of the nature-based. Their existence was either as an individual or in a small number of 2-3 people.

As for the tourism activities carried out, small scale chalet operators do not fix any particular activity for their customers. The tourists are free to choose the activities they desire, either diving, snorkelling, island hopping or others. Nevertheless, there are also chalets that offer diving and snorkelling packages as an alternative or to fulfil their customers’ requests. However, they only handle the reservations while the activities are conducted by the dive shops or snorkelling shops they cooperate with. While the island hoping activity is handed to individual boat operators mostly consist of the fishing village’s residents.

The kind of scenario has in some way created interdependency or business linkages among the tourism stakeholders. For instance, the diving and snorkelling trips organised by small scale dive shops have also included the activity of visits and having meals at the fisherman village as part of the itinerary. At this point, it can be observed that the cooperation between the small scale chalets and tourism services operators like snorkelling has also contributed to the economic development of the village residents of Pulau Perhentian Kechil due to the tourism activities they run. In a way, it can be concluded that the sustainable tourism concept which emphasised on the interrelationship and equilibrium between one element and another, either in the socioeconomic or environmental form, has already existed in the study area through the business model applied by small scale tourism stakeholders.

![Figure 3: Schematic Model of the Tourism Business in Pulau Perhentian Kechil](image-url)
As opposed to the approach adopted by small scale chalet operators, the resort operators’ market segment is more focused towards groups of tourists, delegations and families and arranged packages. They applied the reservation system either by means of travel agencies or the internet where the tourism packages offered usually cover accommodations, boat fares, meals, and activities. Nevertheless, reservations only for accommodations are also allowed.

As for the handling of tourism activities such as diving, snorkelling, and island hopping, which are coordinated based on the packages offered, the resorts in Pulau Perhentian Kechil usually acquire the services of the dive and snorkelling shops operating within their vicinity. Differing from the business received from chalet operators, the business acquired from resorts requires these shops to comply with the list of activities and schedules fixed by the resorts. Normally, tourists are provided with meals by the resorts and the dive or snorkelling shops are not allowed to take them to the fishing village due to reasons such as time constraint and it is not included in the package offered.

In a direct way, resorts are seen capable of bringing in large number of tourists into Pulau Perhentian Kechil but the business linkages are only concentrated on and established among the tourism stakeholders, whereas the contribution to the local occupants is too small. The growth in domestic tourism has caused large number of tourist arrivals to the island at one particular time, by packages and based on seasons such as the school and public holidays. The change in the trend or tourism business model from small scale to one known as ‘high end’ tourism is in line with the state government’s strategy to develop the island as a high income tourism destination in Terengganu. In practice, the transformation has not helped much in increasing the income of the small scale operators as they were not directly involved in the packages or programs of the tourists that visit the island.

**MAIN FINDINGS**

The overall results show that sustainability certification was accepted as a useful tool for scaling up small scale tourism development. However, the results also indicate that before sustainability certification can be developed in Pulau Perhentian Kechil, several issues have to be taken into consideration including from the aspects of small scale stakeholders’ understanding towards sustainable tourism and certification, as well as their acceptance and willingness to participate. In addition, the implementing agencies’ capabilities to conduct the programs should also be measured in term of their understanding of tourism certification, the expertise possessed and the documents which will assist its implementation.

**Perception on The Impact of Tourism Activities and The Issues**

Majority of the operators admitted that Pulau Perhentian Kechil has undergone changes either in a slight or substantial form. As shown in Table 1, 61% of them mentioned the changes are at a substantial level. The operators argued that, in recent years the tourism activities in the island have rapidly increased and have the potential to negatively impact the island’s environment. Through the observations done in the study area (Figure 4), there were many new chalet units and resorts being developed to fulfil tourists’ demand. The high demand for accommodation has caused the owners to increase their chalet units. Also, the triangulation performed on the tourism stakeholders’ opinions and responses from government agencies indicates that the above scenario does exist. The increase of development by years to accommodate tourists’ demand has led to the problem of uncontrolled development. It happens due to two reasons. First, the operators developed or built additional chalets without applying for planning approval from the Local Authority. Second, monitoring and enforcement is difficult to be carried out due to the location factor, being far away from the mainland. The issue of developments without the approval from the authority was also confirmed by a respondent who admitted that the absence of building plans was the reason why they were unable to apply for the bank loans, especially for the works of building additional chalet units and maintenance funding.
The issue of rapid tourism growth has also impacted the existing water supply. The increasing number of development has led to the problem of clean water shortage especially in the dry seasons. In addition, the small scale tourism stakeholders in the area were also faced with waste and garbage management problems. Although the Local Authority have provided a solution for garbage disposal by engaging a contractor to transport the garbage to the mainland, nevertheless, the unorganized handling has caused other pollution problems such as the seawater pollution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status of Changes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No changes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly changed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately changed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantially changed</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Figure 4: The rapid development on the island and the issues of waste management and water supply

Perception and Understanding on Sustainability Certification

The degree of understanding was assessed by asking more detail about tourism certification including on how it functions, the labels of certification and the components (Table 2). On the whole, majority of small scale operators (53.8%) knew and have heard of sustainability certification in which the information was obtained from the state government, local authority, internet, NGOs, magazines, newspapers, conferences and tourism agencies’ representatives. From the percentage of respondents that claimed to be familiar with tourism certification, majority represent the travel agency group who have registered and owned a Malaysian Association of Tours and Travel Agents (MATTA) certificate. Only a small number of chalet operators knew and understand while none of the boat operators admitted to have any knowledge or heard of sustainability certification.
From these findings, it can be assumed that most respondents viewed sustainability certification as equivalent to the certificates that they received upon registration with a tourism organisation. This can be referred to the analysis result which shows the respondents admitted to have heard of tourism certification but do not know how it functions and is applied. Next, the study has also found that the respondents who declared they know tourism certification and how it functions mostly relate tourism certification with certain logos and the need for participants to hold a membership to join. However, they did not give any indications whether they know tourism certification is voluntary and not compulsory for a tourism stakeholder to participate. Only one of the respondents explained that tourism certification involves system assessment, auditing and giving accreditation to program’s participants.

The Acceptance and Readiness of Respondents to Participate in the Sustainability Certification Program

The rate of positive response in term of the operators’ attitude towards the need for involvement in sustainability certification was high (Figure 5), where 92% of them responded by answering ‘yes’. Only 8% had refused to participate. The desire to ensure the return of tourists to Pulau Perhentian Kechil is seen as the main factor that encourages the respondents to agree to participate and accept the tourism certification program. This is because they claimed that most of the tourists are regular tourists with lengthy stay period and thus secure the income of the small scale operators. The competition with other
tourism attractions such as those in Thailand, and rumours on the decline of the quality of the diving sites and corals in Pulau Perhentian Kechil, had caused the decrease to the number of the island’s visitors in the year the study was undertaken. Therefore, the operators expressed that if the participation in sustainability certification is able to secure the confidence of the regular tourists to return, then they are ready to take part. The respondents had also agreed to participate on condition that participation in the sustainability certification program could increase their income, ensure the environment and natural resources are preserved as well as offer recognition to their business. The three aspects are the second important factor for them to agree to participate in the certification program. Nevertheless, respondents are found to slightly agree that tourism certification could help promote their businesses.

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**Figure 5**: The Need and Willingness to Participate in Tourism Certification

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**The Agency to Conduct the Program**

Result from the analysis performed shows that most of the operators thought it should be privatized under the Tourism Stakeholders Association (Table 3). Researcher believes that the tourism operators in the study area are more willing to participate in sustainability certification programs if they are given the opportunity to self-manage. This is due to their argument that they were often not involved in the decisions and development planning process. Consequently, they do not understand the actual requirement of the government agency and this cause conflicts between development suitability and the real needs of small scale stakeholders in the area. There were also operators that believe the government through its tourism-related agency is most qualified to develop and manage the program. Interviews with related agencies also showed that they admitted the government is the best authority to carry out the monitoring task and therefore manage the tourism certification program. This is based on the argument that at the moment, it is found difficult for the stakeholders to give good response to the regulations imposed. Therefore, tourism certification is seen able to be used as a tool to attract their interest to be involved in the planning and development proposed by the related government agency.

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**Table 3**: Preferred Agencies for Sustainability Certification Development and Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agencies</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Stakeholders Association</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Certification Program</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Cooperation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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</table>
The potential of Sustainability Certification Implementation for Small Scale Tourism Development

Overall, the study found that sustainability certification is potential to be developed for the small scale tourism. The potentials are measured based on the acceptance and responds by the operators and related agencies. Majority of the operators stated that they agree to participate while respondents from the agencies mentioned the potentials for sustainability certification either in the aspects of economy, environment or improvement to the planning and development in the tourism sites. However, there are many challenges and constraints that need to be given due attention before this approach can be implemented or introduced to the existing small scale tourism stakeholders. These include the readiness of the tourism industry in Malaysia to adopt, the lack of expertise in the country, perception and understanding of the agencies and tourism stakeholders on the role of sustainability certification, and who should be the leading agency. All these will be the factors which define whether the approach is successful in realising the objectives and subsequently help towards achieving sustainable tourism development.

The findings of the research have various implications towards the sustainable tourism achievement. It is seen as a bottom-up planning approach where the target groups, which are the tourism operators, share initiatives in managing their environment for the purpose of attaining better business opportunities. Apparently, the government and relevant agencies involved in small scale tourism and development can play the role as awarding bodies that will evaluate the performance of tourism stakeholders using the predetermined criteria. Through compulsory requirement for compliance to the criteria, the tourism operators’ activities and performance can be monitored. Ironically, the adoption of sustainability certification would dovetail with policies relating to tourism sustainability at local, state or federal level.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION OF THE FINDINGS

In theory the small scale development poses a minimum impact as compared to the large scale tourism development or mass tourism, however in practice, the abundance of development in one particular location will contribute the same cumulative environmental impact as the latter. The lack of mechanism and development guidelines for small scale tourism development has brought to the necessity to find approaches such as certification that can be used as a control tool cum catalyst to improve the quality of products offered by small scale tourism. Based on the research findings, sustainability certification is potential to be developed as the mechanism for scaling up and controlling small scale tourism activities in Pulau Perhentian Kechil. This is due to the positive responses given by the operators through the acceptation and readiness analyses. However, the poor understanding on sustainability certification poses a challenge to the future implementing agency. Literature shows that the success of a certification program very much relies on the determination of the tourism operator to get involved and carry it out. This is because tourism certification is process-based where performance is evaluated in term of the ability to comply with the fixed criteria. Thus, operators may have to go through certain processes such as changing the existing method of operation to suit the new rules as required by sustainability criteria. Issues like the lack of technological skills and having to stop their operations while upgrading works are done, tend to make them impatient and give up. Therefore, it is not surprising that there are several tourism certification programs for the small scale abroad which had succeeded only at the early stage but are then less welcomed when tourism operators started to refrain from getting involved due to the argument that exist in term of the auditing and accreditation method (Sasidharan and Font, 2001; Honey, 2007). The sustainability certification program for small scale operators in Pulau Perhentian Kechil will experience the same scenario if no systematic approach is adopted. Technology-related training programs should be conducted from time to time apart from providing financial incentives and motivation especially in the process of certification.

The operators insisted that the development and maintenance of sustainability certification, including the development of standards, evaluation, auditing and accreditation are implemented by the Tourism Operators Association. They preferred the program is conducted and maintained by the organization they joined. Nevertheless, in practice, the small scale operators in Pulau Perhentian Kechil do
not have a formal association. At the time of study, it is found difficult for the related government agencies like the State Government, Tourism Malaysia, Marine Park Department and Besut District Council to get them involved in the tourism planning and programs as they do not have an association that can serve to channel the planning information and programs to all the small scale operators. Furthermore, the finding reveals that although the operators claimed they know about sustainability certification, they do not know in detail how the program is developed and implemented. Evidently, the finding illustrates that the small scale tourism operators here lack the expert to develop the tourism certification on their own. This indicates the need for professional guidance from the relevant agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations for the implementation of sustainability certification for small scale tourism development are made based on the coordination of the major findings with the policies and strategies for achieving sustainable tourism. Suggestions are made in term of the type of certification suitable to be developed, program implementation and monitoring stage.

Suggestion on Developing Sustainability Certification for Small Scale Tourism Development as a Composite Based Certification

The implication on the practice argue that a small scale tourism activity/operator as an individual does not pose a significant impact on sustainability as compared to the cumulative impact which will be generated by many operators simultaneously in an area. Therefore, this research suggests that the sustainability certification program is implemented in the form of composite based certification. This means that all the small scale tourism operators in Pulau Perhentian Kechil will have to participate and together contribute towards the implementation of the certification program. Pulau Perhentian Kechil can be taken as a model and pilot project where its implementation at this stage needs to be led by the government agency in order to help small scale operators absorb the costs to adopt the sustainable green technology.

Proposed Stages for the Development and Implementation

The development and implementation of sustainability certification for small scale tourism development is suggested to be divided into seven stages namely the stage of identification of leading agency, assessing small scale operators’ awareness and readiness to participate, preparing and developing of proper organisation, evaluating the performance, analysing the data, awarding the certification and funding. The framework is as illustrated in Figure 6.

STAGE 1 – Identification of the Agency Responsible for Conducting Sustainability Certification

The development stage should begin with the identification of the agency owning and responsible for the tourism certification program, preparation of the manual of the certification process and designing the standard and criteria.

Step 1 – Define the Specific Agency

The defining of the specific agency to implement tourism certification is suggested to be performed by Ministry of Tourism Malaysia via its Policy Planning and International Affairs Division, considering that the division is also currently responsible for star rating of hotels. Overall, the roles of the division should include:
- function to blueprint and design tourism certification programs
- outline the method of implementation as to how certification will be awarded
- provide the standard and criteria for evaluation
- identify the body responsible for evaluating, auditing and awarding the certification
- prepare the manual for the tourism certification implementation

**Figure 6**: The Framework for the Assessment and Certification of Small Scale Tourism Operator
Step 2 – Prepare the Manual and Design the Compliance Criteria

The sustainability certification manual will act as the guideline for implementation. The manual needs to provide the information related to the process and components of certification including the enrolment procedure, standard and criteria, assessment and auditing, logo, membership, fees and cost.

The preparing of the manual and designing of certification can be done by involving all relevant interest groups such as different government authorities, tourism trade associations and other private groups such as academics, research institutions and NGOs. Also at this stage, the considerations in designing the certification program should be coordinated with requirement of the existing strategy or regulations associated with small scale tourism.

The designing and development of the certification criteria is the most challenging stage within the overall process of tourism certification programs development. It needs to be suited to the business nature of small scale tourism and its ability to adhere to the developed criteria. The certification criteria normally used has considered the three dimensions of sustainability which are physical and environmental, socio cultural and economic. Therefore, it is suggested that the development of criteria begins with the defining of the core and supplementary criteria specifically for the different types of small scale tourism operators such as the accommodation operators, boat services, dive shop operators and travel agencies. This way, the criteria developed will be more comprehensive and represent the whole small scale tourism activities in Pulau Perhentian Kechil. The certification criteria for small scale tourism can also be formed by coordinating them with the statutory regulation and existing standards applied in government agencies related to tourism development.

STAGE 2 – Assessing the Small Scale Operators Awareness and Readiness to Participate

This is the preliminary stage to educate and prepare the operators for sustainability certification. The aim is to determine the level of awareness among the small scale operators towards the need to jointly participate in the agenda to fully achieve sustainable tourism. Several actions would need to be taken at this stage:

Step 1 – Organise preliminary discussion session with small scale operators

A session with the small scale tourism operators needs to be arranged for introducing sustainability certification. In this session, justification could be given on why they have to take part, its implementation process and how to join the program. Printed material like pamphlets or brochures containing information relating to the certification, the participation form, the party to be contacted for further details and information on the process of implementation of sustainability certification program, and the incentives offered should be disseminated during this session.

Also in this meeting, a brainstorming session should be conducted where the operators are given the freedom to express their views and opinions, especially in identifying the catalyst factors or barriers faced by the operators to engage in sustainability certification. These need to be compiled and the factors should be analysed to identify the operators’ real needs and solve the issues and problems they presented.

Step 2 – Assess the existing performance through the yes and no questions or checklist

This action is aimed to identify the current level of practice among the small scale operators’ where they have indirectly operated their businesses while taking into account sustainability measures. The information gathered at this level will indirectly help the implementing agency to assess the level of awareness and readiness of small scale operators to be involved in sustainability certification. A set of 17 ‘yes’ and ‘no’ questions or checklist adapted from several literature
(Goodall and Stabler, 2000; Bien, 2001; Honey and Bien, 2003) is proposed for use as listed in Table 4.

**Table 4: Sustainability Practice Checklist**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Sustainability Practice</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Water consumption</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waste water management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recycling or reuse</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Efficient use of resources</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Energy</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Energy consumption</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generate energy from renewable resources</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Waste</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce waste</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage re-use and/or repair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage recycling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimize local pollution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dispose of waste properly</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Physical and Land use</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Environment conservation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wildlife protection</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Local Community</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct or indirect economic benefit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase local employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involve in developments</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage local action and decision making</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Step 3 – Identify the need and the type of support required**

The type of need and support required by the small scale operators to enable them to operate and the extent to which the tourism activities they run comply to the criteria set in sustainability certification have to be determined at this stage. This includes the suitable technology transfer, training, workshop and consultation required.

**Step 4 – Set up a proper small scale operators organisation**

A specific organisation made up of small scale operators is proposed. The formation will identify the leadership and role to be played by each portfolio that is created. The representative of this organisation will represent it in every meetings and discussions with the implementing agency especially for the planning and implementation of sustainability certification.

**STAGE 3 – Preparation for sustainability certification and evaluating of performance**

At this stage, the task to be performed would be to ensure that the operators have fully understood and are ready to participate in sustainability certification. Their performance will be assessed using the rating system to determine their stage of achievement. The suggested steps to be taken are as follows:

**Step 1 – Prepare the small scale tourism operators for sustainability certification**

The preparation of the operators for the sustainability certification program is to train them in using the manual and input relating to their operations based on the requirement of the criteria and standard. This is to be coupled with motivational measures to build their confidence in this program and give guidance at every stage of the process. A clear definition of each criterion and the method for compliance will need to be emphasized.
Step 2 – Identify the parties that need incentives and funding

It is suggested that incentives are provided as an encouragement for the small scale tourism operators to join the program. Incentives can be given in the form of working capital (for replacing the existing waste, electricity and water management systems with those comply with the tourism certification requirement), management expertise, technical assistance and promotions. The need for provision of capitals is proposed based on the study findings which indicate that the lack of respondents’ interest to participate can be significantly associated with the costs incurred for participation in tourism certification programs, especially for small scale tourism operators.

Funding in the form of grants and loan should also be offered as incentive. Grants can be provided to cater for the costs of mitigating the negative impact and installation of proper waste management and proper drainage system for waste water. On the other hand, the provisions of loans are for the funding of business development and water and electricity consumption. For the purpose, information regarding the candidates and the form of incentives required will need to be gathered and recorded.

As the implementation of sustainability certification is seen to benefit the Local Authority and Marine Park Department as well in terms of management of environmental resources and fostering better tourism development, it is suggested that they too have to contribute in term of providing incentives such as through minimizing the cost for waste management, providing facilities for solid waste disposal and so forth.

Step 3 – Assign an environmental officer to act as an on-site coordinator

To enable the idea of tourism certification to succeed, there need to be a regulation that requires the presence of an environmental officer who will monitor and ensure the criteria required are at all times taken into account and implemented. This officer will report monthly the operators’ sustainability status to the body responsible for evaluating and awarding the certification.

Step 4 – Compile the daily performance data

The gathering and compiling of the daily performance data for every small scale operators’ activities is the most important task in this stage. A method or compiling system in the form of checklist, log book, form, document or others is recommended to ease the recording of the operators, performance and their achievement for each criterion.

STAGE 4 - Auditing

In this stage, the operators will be evaluated through standard and criteria whereby auditing and monitoring measures will be put in place to ensure adherence to the set quality standards. Auditing will be carried out by the auditor that will be appointed by the sustainability certification implementing agency. It is suggested that the auditing is carried out in two stages that is, firstly by evaluating the monthly performance report and secondly by performing a systematic on site inspections. The audit results at both stages will then have to be presented in the evaluation committee meeting. At this auditing stage, the level of compliance will be determined and used as the base for certification award.

STAGE 5 – Awarding the Certification

The last stage is the awarding of the certification to the small scale tourism operators of Pulau Perhentian Kechil as a composite certification. In order to retain the certification, auditing and
monitoring measures will be done periodically and suggested yearly to ensure the adherence to the criteria set.

STAGE 6 – The Monitoring Stage

The award of sustainability certification is suggested to be in the form that needs to be renewed on an annual basis. As cited in the literature, most of the certification programs have a life span between 1 to 3 years. This need to be done to ensure that the small scale operators involved will continue to improve the performance of their tourism activities to comply with the sustainability criteria set.

STAGE 7 – The Marketing and Expansion Stage

The implementation of sustainability certification in Pulau Perhentian Kechil can serve as the pilot project to assess to what extent has the certification program approach help in achieving sustainable tourism development in Malaysia. For the purpose, the suggested implementing agency, which is MOTOUR, will need to help promote the certified small scale tourism businesses in the island either through portals, websites or other official documents. Apart from helping to promote their business, it can be used for the purpose of identifying sustainability certification implementation for other small scale operators in Malaysia. In addition, efforts need to be directed towards harnessing the minds of small scale operators to positively accept tourism certification through sustainable tourism oriented programs, trainings and seminars. This can be done through collaborations between Tourism Malaysia, government agencies and NGOs.

CONCLUSION

Certification program for tourism has been recognised as one of the instruments or mechanism for achieving sustainable tourism while at the same time facilitating effective small scale tourism and land management. The certification programs development with the major aim to realise environmental and social sustainability in tourism related industry has succeeded in controlling the destruction of natural resources. Thus, the role and potential of sustainability certification should be extended to include the Malaysian perspective as it may not only benefit the tourism business industry, but also act as an effective alternative for the government in directing regulations and as a flexible approach for monitoring.

REFERENCES


The Institute of Policy Studies (2002). Sustainable Tourism Accreditation: what we know, what’s needs and why, World Ecotourism Summit, May 19, 2002


