Travelling to Prosperity

A look into the inclusionary transformation processes of the Perhentian Islands

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Abstract:

The tourism industry has the potential to bring sustainable growth to regions suffering from economic hardship. However, in order for tourism to live up to this potential, it is imperative that the traditional dynamics of tourism development are challenged. Decentralized decision-making and community empowerment have proven to be powerful factors in ensuring bottom-up development in the case of the Perhentian Islands. Alternative tourism strategies such as ecotourism and volunteer tourism show much promise for ensuring that tourism activities conform to the triple bottom line, if executed and managed in a responsible manner. The primary data for this paper comes from a qualitative study using the participant observation method and semi-structured interviews, from the viewpoint of a volunteer tourist in the Perhentian Islands. Collaboration between the stakeholders in a host community can ensure the evolution of necessary institutions to minimize the potential negative aspects of tourism growth and maximize the benefits for the community.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The tourism industry has without a doubt served to promote economic growth in many developing regions around the world. "Tourism is viewed as a way to transform, restructure and deliver sustainable economic growth for declining regions, particularly at the local level" (McLennan et al., 2012). However, not all tourism development has been equal in terms of inclusiveness, ownership, and participation of the local populations in the host communities. Milne and Ateljevic argue that economic transformation into a tourism economy needs to be planned in order to ensure the positive benefits of tourism with minimum negative impacts on society, the economy, and the environment (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). The successfulness of inclusionary tourism development is even a higher priority in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). SIDS have several economic disadvantages, including but not limited to, high transportation costs, difficulties achieving economies of scale, shortage of land for agriculture and dependency on the prices of staple goods from the mainland (Nunkoo et al., 2010).

As the neo-liberalist development strategies continue to receive much criticism, the development community has begun to focus on other development indicators besides just economic growth. Social and environmental effects of development are being taken into account, and measures such as income equality, standard of living, and quality of life are included along with gross domestic product (GDP) growth figures when measuring the successfulness of development in an area. Concepts such as the triple bottom line (TBL) have emerged to try and create a harmonious relationship between society, the economy and the environment. The three parts of the TBL are the people, the planet, and profit (Stoddard et al, 2012). Alas, as history has shown us, if left in the hands of private corporations, the latter tends to have a higher priority at the cost of the environment and society. Public participation is important in tourism development for all key stakeholders to protect local communities from the potential adverse impacts and to diversify the benefits from tourism development (Timothy, 1999).

The Perhentian Islands makes for an interesting case in tourism transformation studies as the local population has managed to fend off many of the negative impacts from the transformation to a tourism economy. The small size of the islands makes the possibility of any industrial sector nearly obsolete and before it was discovered as an "island paradise", the economy was almost entirely based on fishing. Due to the establishment of the Redang Island Marine Park in 1998 (Tourism Malaysia, 2013), which includes the waters surrounding the Perhentian Islands in a 3 nautical mile radius, the fishing industry on the islands was devastated, creating increased pressure on the tourism transformation and making it's success even more important than before. Being located in the poorest state of Malaysia and having roughly 20% of the population living below the poverty line, there remains room for improvement in the development process in the region (Department of Statistics 2010).

1.1 Research Question

The aim of this paper is to look at how tourism can create equal opportunities to ensure the livelihoods of host communities through all stages of tourism transformation. McLennan et al. (2012) speaks about the 3 stages of tourism transformation: inception, construction and urbanization as if the development was linear. By zooming out the focus and looking at tourism transformation briefly across

these stages, a more general view of the positive and negative impacts of tourism development can be accounted for and analyzed, possibly even creating a basis for further studies in different regions. Given that my empirical data and field work is only from the Perhentian islands, I will only claim to analyze the processes of transformation on the islands alone. Consequently, the research question for this thesis is: How can the transformation process to a tourism economy create the mechanisms of inclusive growth in the Perhentian islands?

Chapter 2: Methodology

In any type of study, it is important to determine the most efficient method in receiving data that will be relevant to the research. Ongoing debates in the scientific community continue between the value and validity of qualitative versus quantitative studies, however, I believe many will agree the answer is relative to the study being performed. Everything cannot always be quantified or graphed and open-ended interviews are notoriously difficult to replicate, but if one is aware of the benefits and weaknesses of each method, then an educated decision can be made as to which method to choose.

2.1 Qualitative Study

Qualitative methods are used normally in smaller-scale studies that are executed on a more personal level. Often times the subject matter is controversial and complex, and sufficient data cannot be gathered through a questionnaire or survey. Sometimes qualitative research is defined as research that does not collect quantitative data, but that definition does not describe the wide availability of different applications for the method (Bryman, 367:2008). Qualitative studies are beneficial when one is looking for answers to a question and cannot presuppose all of the possible answers as would be needed in a questionnaire. It allows for researchers to use inductive reasoning and "work backwards" in relation to the normal path of hypothesis construction. In other words, the researcher can create a hypothesis or theory based on the answers received instead of guessing what the answers might be beforehand. Initial advances by the researcher into a specific social setting can lead to informed and complex answers by the respondent causing new unexpected focuses to emerge (Holliday, 20:2007). With qualitative studies, the initial focus often ends up evolving to something unforeseen by the researcher due to the unpredictable nature of the respondents' answers, and the

study accommodates this accordingly.

A common criticism of qualitative research is the issue of subjectivity; often in regards to the researcher determining what is and is not relevant to the research. Subjectivity is also present in quantitative studies, for example in the choosing of questions for surveys and in deciding the sample, but since qualitative research deals with less uniform processes it is often unclear why certain decisions are made and biases can arise and remain unreported. The best defense against this is to meticulously describe the reasoning behind each decision throughout the study and to try to keep personal prejudices out of decisions (Holliday, 24:2007). This is sometimes easier said than done and ultimately it relies on the integrity of the researcher to be honest in reporting the actual motivations and processes, as it is difficult for a third party to verify after the fact.

2.2 Participant Observation / Ethnography

The specific form of qualitative method I have used is called participant observation or ethnography, while the two are synonyms, participant observation is often used more to describe the actual method as opposed to the action, so from here on out I will use the term participant observation exclusively but it pertains to both the method used and my actions during the research. According to Bryman, participant observation is when a researcher is immersed, "in a group for an extended period of time, observing behavior, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, and asking questions" (Bryman, 402:2008).

I was a participant observer in the Ecoteer project, a volunteer organization in the Perhentian Islands that is focused on sustainable community development, public education, and environmental conservation. I spent six weeks in the program as a normal volunteer, participating in everything the other volunteers partook in. While volunteering, I made an effort to understand the motivations behind each activity, who benefited from the activities and how efficient they were. I found key informants within the project manager of Ecoteer and the head of the village. Key informants are important to a researcher because they often develop an interest in the research and can give one access to certain people or information that otherwise would be unknown or unavailable to the researcher (Bryman, 409:2008). One of the main

factors in choosing participant observation should be the researcher believes that, "the shared cultural meanings of the group are crucial to understanding its behavior" (Punch, 152:2005). Due to the fact that I am researching tourism transformation in a conservative community that is 100% Malay Muslim, it is imperative that I understand their culture and belief systems. Tourism brings in many Westerners that embrace "yellow culture" (non-Islamic sanctioned) and it is important to understand the concerns of the people if tourism is to grow without affecting the quality of life of the locals.

2.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

I chose to use the semi-structured strategy when performing my interviews because I wanted to make sure that a certain few questions were asked in every interview. In the unstructured interview, broad topics may be brought up, but questions will be asked unsystematically and some important issues may never get raised or be forgotten about by the interviewer. I created a list of 10 questions surrounding the locals' opinions on Ecoteer, tourism development, and the marine park that encompasses the island. I ran a pilot test of the questions with one of the neighbors of the Ecoteer house and with SehLing as translator. At the conclusion of the pilot test, it was apparent that one question needed to be re-written for clarification and another question was too similar to a previous question. I had already included two different probing questions to check if the respondents understood what I had asked and to verify their answers; so another redundant question seemed unnecessary and was changed. After the revision, we ran another pilot test, which ran smoothly, and I finalized the interview guide. SehLing, the project manager of Ecoteer, translated all of the interviews except the two interviewing teachers. The interview guide can be found in Appendix I, and the interview transcripts can be made available upon request.

2.4 Sampling

I decided to implement purposive sampling when choosing my interviewees due to the fact that I only had 6 weeks total on the islands and I had not planned to begin interviewing before I became acquainted with the program, the daily operations and the people of the village. Purposive sampling is, "strategic and entails an attempt to establish a good correspondence between research questions and sampling" (Bryman,

458:2008). Estimating that I could not complete more than 15 interviews, I wanted to make sure I represented all of the major demographics on the island. Racial inclusion was not a necessary factor in this study as the village is 100% Malay and Muslim. My aim was to have an equal number of male and female respondents, representatives from all the major occupations, and an age distribution similar to that of the village's. Several of the people worked multiple jobs, so I categorized people based on their primary source of income. The division of labor on the islands is very gender specific, for example all of the boat drivers and teachers are male. As a result, certain genders ended up representing entire occupations as well, which can be important to note. I drew up a model of the demographics I was searching for and made a list of those I knew that fit the model and could interview. SehLing, who is acquainted with nearly everyone in the village, found me the remaining candidates to fill the holes in my target demographics. I am aware of the bias in having a third party help choose the interviewees for me to interview, but it seemed like the most practical solution with the given time constraints.

2.5 Delimitations

While this paper looks to analyze primarily small island economies and their transformations, similar processes can occur in mainland regions as well. Given the short time span of my research and the limited empirical research used, I am hesitant to draw any sort of major generalizations from my findings. Due to the qualitative nature of my research, my interviews were quite time consuming and small in quantity so they cannot be considered representative of the entire population. However, granted that there are 1300 inhabitants and I had 13 respondents of different demographics, that gives me a 1% response rate which is still quite high for qualitative interview and population ratios. Of the interviews I conducted, there were a lot of common responses and certain questions had 100% unanimity in their responses, even with the open-ended structure of the interviews, giving the impression that many of the villagers were like-minded in certain areas.

In almost any type of research, there will be certain biases that are extremely hard to avoid. The tool available to combat this is to explicitly state the actual or even possible biases that may exist in a study; with the strategy that transparency will help the readers understand what circumstances led the researcher to allow such biases and

what is done to minimize their effects. Whenever interviews are done with a translator, there will always be a chance of bias in the translation, as the translator can essentially say whatever he/she wants the interviewer to hear. In my case, I had some questions about public opinions of the Ecoteer organization, which could have caused a conflict of interest, due to the fact that SehLing was the project manager of Ecoteer. I could not avoid this predicament because SehLing is the only fluent English speaker in the village, however I do not believe it will be an issue as Ecoteer is not of much importance to my thesis, but rather a doorway into the community and insight into a volunteer organization. Another issue that I noticed was that of paraphrasing, at some points the interviewee would be speaking for 5 minutes straight and my translation would be merely a sentence or two, leading me to believe I am missing part of my response. When I discussed this with SehLing, she responded that much of the responses were hard to interrupt to translate midway through, and the interviewees often went off topic, which is why she claimed her translations were commonly shorter.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Neo-classical economics has long stressed that developing countries must go through an agrarian revolution in order achieve sustained economic growth. Developing countries tend to have high portions of the population in the agriculture sector, a sector commonly attributed to having low productivity and using classical technology. In the most common cases, through productivity gains in the agricultural sector, investment and labor can be freed up and released to the highly productive industrial sector (Diao et al., 2006). The traditional transformation from agriculture to industrialization is, for the most part, unavailable in SIDS due to land constraints and high transportation costs. Through the commodification of the environment, SIDS can utilize their natural beauty to bring in foreign exchange, tax revenues, lower unemployment and promote sustainable economic growth (McLennan et al., 2009). Tourism transformation requires considerable planning in order to avoid the marginalization of the host population economically, socially and culturally. The chase for economic growth can lead to the privatization of development decisions, overexpansion, and foreign ownership at the expense of the livelihoods of the locals and environmental conservation. In any structural transformation, the institutions must evolve and adapt also to accommodate for the new demands of the economy,

and lacking or lagging in doing so results in rough transitions that hurts the poorest members of society the most (McLennan et al., 2010). Several theories have been formed to explain the processes of tourism transformation, but no single theory suffices completely in explaining the transformation that has occurred in the Perhentian Islands. However, several theories seem to explain different aspects of the transformation resulting in my using a sort of "theoretical cosmopolitan" to explain the phenomena occurring in the Perhentian Islands.

The dominant theory guiding the framework of this paper is the Resilience theory, which argues, "local knowledge is important for resource management, which is often generated via a process of 'learning by doing'" (Hamzah & Hampton, 2012). However, Resilience theory also recognizes that cultural knowledge should not dismiss scientific knowledge, but rather each should complement one another through education of the host population to allow for small-scale tourism development to move up the value chain (Folke et al., 2005). This theory speaks for Perhentian Islands' Resilience against foreign investor intrusion into the market and their utilization of local knowledge and communal participation to develop the islands locally. Langkawi, albeit a much larger island, began its tourism transformation at around the same time as the Perhentian Islands, and today foreign transnational tourism conglomerates own much of the land and the coast is scattered with high-rise hotels. While the majority of tourism theories show development occurring down a linear path towards urbanization, Resilience theory contends that, under the right conditions, small-scale tourism can counter-react towards the invasive, capital hungry corporations causing more of a cyclical development based on exogenous actions and local reactions (Hamzah & Hampton, 2012). Furthermore the Resilience theory argues that there are too many stakeholders in a tourism economy with different interests to allow a single technocrat to make decisions. Collaboration among stakeholders is necessary to find a balance between development and preservation, economic, social and environmental goals, and to ensure an understanding of both natural and cultural resources (Dowling, 2003, as cited in Wegner et al., 2009).

Resilience theory draws many parallels with Neopopulist theory, with the latter focusing even more on community involvement in tourism development as opposed to the former stressing the importance of collaboration among all stakeholders.

Neopopulist theory contends that local communities are the largest beneficiaries of tourism development and have to live with the results of tourism decisions made, and therefore should be involved in the planning process (Scheyvens, 2002). This community based priority of the Neopopulist theory is extremely relevant in this Perhentian Islands case as many of the islanders are related and view themselves as family, which can be a determinant for the high levels of community participation in development matters. Nevertheless, this community camaraderie does not need to be constrained to the Perhentian Islands, and similar inclusive tourism transformations can occur elsewhere if the prioritization of participation is present.

In the field of development, there is no lack of literature surrounding the importance of sound institutions in order to have a functional government, experience economic growth and have social and environmental harmony. Transformation theory is an approach that can be used to understand the dynamic interaction between structure and institutions under a period of transition (McLennan et al., 2009). For a tourism transformation to occur smoothly, new institutions need to develop also to meet the new demands of the economy, society and the environment. Proper planning must take place to decide which institutions are necessary and how the development of them will take place, but most importantly the stakeholders should be involved in the decision making process. Occupational unions and innovative education institutions are among the most important to consolidate interests, to protect ideals, and adapt to future demands. Alternative tourism industries such as ecotourism and volunteer tourism can be utilized to keep the triple bottom line and encourage sustainable development.

Chapter 4: Literature Review

4.1 Community Participation and Empowerment

Sustainable Tourism has become a popular sub-branch of the even more popular sustainable development movement, with the former first receiving worldwide recognition from the Brundtland report in 1987 (WCED, as cited in Cole, 2006). The word sustainability has brought environmental issues to the forefront of discussion in the news and in politics, in some cases making great strides to extend environmental protection. However, new environmental priorities in tourism have overshadowed socio-cultural issues, leaving them often to be overlooked (Cole, 2006). While the

economic benefits of tourism for developing regions are commonly acknowledged, it is often unrecognized that the economic prosperity is normally enjoyed only by the elites if poor policy, low participation and low levels of tourism knowledge are common characterstics in the host community. The damage to culture and tradition is another aspect often overlooked when politicians or elites with macroeconomic priorities are the ones making the decisions (Pongponrat, 2011). Another concern with tourism as a development strategy is that tourism development on small islands can be considered a condition of dependency. Dependency has been previously defined as "a conditioning situation in which the economies of one group of countries are conditioned by the development and expansions of others" (Dos Santos, 1970 as cited in Nunkoo et al., 2010). By this definition, it can be argued that the host communities of tourism locations are dependent on the economic wellness and willingness of foreign populations to come and visit the host community, reflecting the center-periphery dependency model of development (Nunkoo et al., 2010).

Community participation arose in the 1990's and has since then gained popularity as a popular strategy to offset the negative socio-cultural effects of tourism. Engaging the stakeholders in the decision making process and understanding their needs is vital to improve the effectiveness of tourism plans and to balance the benefits from tourism (Marzuki et al., 2012). Jamal and Stronza (2009) argue that collaboration between the community, local government and the private sector "provides for a dynamic process that evolves over time, enabling multiple stakeholders to jointly address problems or issues. A further extension of community participation is called community-based tourism (CBT), which is an alternative form of tourism where the community is completely in charge and manages tourism development in the region. CBT emphasizes "community empowerment and ownership as a means to sustain the community growth" (Hamzah & Hampton, 2012). This focus on the community is seen as a bottom-up approach to development, enabling the people on the bottom rungs of the development ladder to take control of their own future and to tailor tourism development around their own specific needs. This is opposed to traditional top-down approaches where decisions were made from political and/or economic elites who aim to protect their own interests before those of the people (Hamzah & Hampton, 2012). However, there are different levels of participation ranging from "being consulted" to actually having the power to make changes, the latter being true

empowerment and the aim of most community participation literature (Cole 2006). Caters (1995) argues that the debate around community participation is not whether or not local communities should be involved in tourism development, but rather how they should be involved and if involvement means control (As cited in Razzaq et al., 2011). While much of the literature on the subject agrees that involvement does in fact mean control, the logistics of implementing a transition is tough when there is a strong centralized government (Marzuki et al., 2012).

Murphy (1985) makes the point that tourism is a service industry, and is highly dependent on the good will and cooperation of the host communities. Furthermore, several studies show that friendliness of the locals ranks high as a determinant in choosing of a destination (As cited in Cole, 2006). Social exchange theory assumes that people will view tourism more positively if they believe they will benefit from it, and people are more likely to believe in the benefits of tourism if they are involved in tourism development and they feel a sense of ownership throughout the entire process (Nunkoo et al., 2010).

4.2 Education and Human Capital

It is difficult to get the local population involved in tourism development if they are uneducated about the industry. In his study of tourism in rural Indonesia, Cole (2006) proposes that, "the greatest barrier lies in the villager's lack of confidence and knowledge." Amartya Sen, a long proponent of human capital, argues that the ultimate goal of a developing society should not be to be in command of their economic resources, but rather being able to function well with the resources at their disposal (Sen 1985, 1990, 1997, as cited in Croes, 2012). Sen makes an extremely valid argument, as all the work put into getting people involved in tourism planning is wasted if the people do not understand what to do with that power. However, this is not meant to undermine the knowledge of the locals about their own region and culture. Returning back to Cole's experience in Indonesia, he writes that the locals in the small village of Bena were much more knowledgeable than the tour guides bringing the tourists there, but unfortunately none of the villagers could speak English. Furthermore Cole writes that's the "villagers' lack of tourism understanding is linked to the unfulfilled potential for further tourism development" in the region (Cole 2006). Many researchers mention the troubles of beginning the transition to

community participation, however it has been proposed that it should commence with educating and empowering citizens (King et al, 1998)

In order to ensure that tourism development is sustainable, environmental degradation must be at a minimum. According to the UN Environmental Program (UNEP, 1995), some of the most prominent negative effects of tourism include destruction of marine ecosystems from sea transport and poor disposal of sewage, extensive infrastructure networks and building expansion that destroy the flora and fauna, noise pollution, deforestation and exhaustion of fisheries (UNEP, 1995, as cited in Skanivis & Sakellari, 2011). If the expansion of tourism ruins the environment that the tourists come to see, then the eventual outcome will be a less desirable tourist destination and lower tourism revenues, rendering the entire expansion as being counter-productive. This is equally important on land and in marine ecosystems, with most tourists intentionally travelling to tourist destinations that have nice beaches and marine attractions including surfing, swimming, snorkeling, and scuba diving. If proper planning and regulations are not implemented and enforced, the higher demand for food resulting from tourist expansion can cause the exhaustion of local fisheries around an island tourist destination (Briguglio & Briguglio, 1996). This can be detrimental not only to the aquatic environment, but also to the underwater aesthetics that lure tourists to a destination.

4.3 Ecotourism

Ecotourism has become an increasingly popular vacation alternative in developing countries in the past two decades and it has been recognized as having the potential to be a more sustainable tourism option if undertaken correctly (Fletcher, 2009). While there are many different definitions for Ecotourism, the term is generally used to describe "environmentally friendly" vacations where participants engage in outdoor activities in a rural atmosphere and usually encounter local inhabitants at least some of the time during the process. Some of the "eco-tours" are more focused on certain issues, such as wildlife protection of endangered species, others are more focused on the natural preservation of the landscape's forestation, and finally some are more geared towards human development of the local inhabitants (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2011).

Ecotourism is a response to the heavy environmental degradation that is occurring in many developing countries, both as a result of tourist expansion and local extraction industries such as mining, agriculture and forestry. The goal of ecotourism is to show locals in developing countries the value of their natural environment, and enable them to profit through conservation, therefore creating a win-win situation. Honey (2008) argues, "if ecotourism is to be viewed as a tool for rural development, it must also help to shift economic and political control to the local community, village, cooperative or entrepreneur" (Honey, 2008, as cited in Fletcher, 2009). So while ecotourism looks promising as an alternative approach to conventional tourism development, the basic principles of community participation and empowerment, as mentioned in the previous section, are necessary to ensure the benefits of tourism are accessible to the entire population of the host community.

Since there is not a widely accepted international definition or guidelines for what is and what is not considered to be ecotourism, many tourism business are adding the "eco" prefix to their names in order to appear more environmentally friendly and attract a wider market without actually making any changes. The prefix "eco" stimulates most people to automatically think of the environment, so it becomes quite easy to assume that ecotourism is just a more environmentally friendly way of doing business, which to some people could mean just using five percent less water and electricity each month. Ecotourism must contribute to poverty alleviation and regional development in less-favored areas and, "…affirmative action policies, such as purchasing local goods and services, carrying capacity building, focused education and training are also critical" (Fotiou et al., 2002). Not only are the aforementioned characteristics of ecotourism intrinsically good for human development, but also it is also advantageous in the success of ecotourism initiatives in general. Many traditional industries in developing regions are strongly linked to cultural traditions and may be hard to break. Furthermore the preservation of culture has become increasingly prioritized over economic gains in recent times due to globalization and the melting pot of cultures that comes with it. Therefore, in order to change local mindsets from extraction to conservation, there needs to be a greater number of local owners and partners of ecotourism to indulge in the benefits and spread the ideals within the community (Crapper, 1998)

4.4 Volunteer tourism / Voluntourism

Volunteer tourism, or its portmanteau adaptation named voluntourism, is another form of alternative tourism under the umbrella of ecotourism. While generally following the environmental and social prerequisites of good ecotourism policy, as the name suggests, the main difference is the voluntary nature of it. Voluntourists spend money to travel to an exotic location just as any other tourist, but when they arrive to their destination, the voluntourists will be volunteering their time doing various community-based activities, as opposed to relaxing on the beach. The center point of voluntourism rhetoric is that, "tourism ventures can and should bring about positive impacts to host destinations, and through the means of volunteering, tourists can make a direct and tangible improvement to host communities" (Sin, 2010). Examples of activities include teaching English and other subjects, organic farming and composting, conservation efforts, and painting to name a few. Volunteer tourists experience a cultural exchange that is aimed to be mutually beneficial for both parties, as both the hosts and the tourists can learn about each other's lives and culture (Lee & Woosnam 2010). The integrative cross-cultural adaptive theory brought forth by Kim (2001) argues that voluntourism can alter the original identity of a tourist from, "one being rooted in being a voluntourist from another culture to one that encompasses greater interculturalness" (Kim 2001, Less & Woosnam, 2010).

As with most development strategies, volunteer tourism does not come without critics. Palacios (2010) makes the point that voluntourism organizations need to harmonize personal and institutional expectations with the volunteers, in order to get a realistic view of their abilities as to maximize the potential benefits of the visit. I can comment on my field study in the Perhentian Islands, which will be covered in more detail later on, I was a part of the a voluntourism organization and we had a set schedule that repeated itself once a week. The skill levels of the volunteers that were present each week in the activities we performed was related to how successful I felt the activities were for the community, especially in the areas of teaching. Questions have also been raised about the accountability of voluntourism organizations and accusations have been made about there being a neo-colonialist nature to the programs (Sin 2010). However, I believe once again the argument takes us back to community participation and empowerment. Voluntourists are responsible to the community, and it is up to the organization to be transparent in what they want to do,

and discussions need to be had to ensure that it is acceptable to the people in the host community. While there are no international regulations about this, it does not mean that it cannot be executed correctly.

4.5 The Three Stages of Tourism Development

When the potential of tourism development is realized in a community or region a transformation begins to take place. Resources from the existing local economy are reallocated to the emerging tourism economy to handle the new demand, but without proper institutional change and planning, the benefits of tourism can be lost on certain groups. Sergeyev and Moscardini (2006) describe transformational change as an ongoing cycle with three stages that commences in a steady state, then initiates change and finally enters into a new equilibrium state before another change can occur. This transformational model has been applied to tourism transformation by changing the dynamics of the model from cyclical to linear and renaming the three stages inception, construction and urbanization (McLennan 2009).

4.5.1 Stage 1: Inception

In the inception stage, a community may be receiving a small number of grassroots or backpacker tourists coming to admire the landscape or the culture of a region. It has been argued that a destinations level of economic development can also have an effect on its tourism development stage, as it might be hard to find capital for investments in struggling economies (Buhalis, 2000, as cited in McLennan et al., 2012). While there are no clear boundaries for the different stages of development, I believe the use of common sense allows us to roughly predict the stages to a degree sufficient enough for this discussion.

Wogo and Bena are two small villages in the Ngadha province in rural Indonesia. Bena, the most popular of the two in terms of tourist visits, had an annual number of 9000 tourists in 1997 (Regency Department of Education and Culture, 1998). Given that the most popular village has an average of 25 visitors per day, I believe it is safe to categorize Wogo and Bena in the first, or inception, stage of tourism development. Stroma Cole (1997, 1999, 2006) conducted a longitudinal study and a PhD thesis on tourism development in the region on local perceptions of tourism. The locals were positive towards tourism and felt honored to have their culture admired as much for

people to travel long distances to see and experience it. The two major complaints were of lack of education surrounding tourism and the inability to determine the path of the development.

Tour guides from larger cities in Indonesia, who can speak English, bring tourists to the rural villages of Wogo and Bena to show the beautiful landscapes and describe the culture. However, the culture in the villages vary even from village to village, and it would be much more appropriate for local villagers to be tour guides, but unfortunately the schools do not teach English. Furthermore the centralized hierarchy of government in Indonesia makes nearly all of the tourism development decisions, even on the local level, without providing any relevant information or training to the communities (Cole 2006). For example, three home-stays were built in the village without any villagers understanding what a home-stay is. Without anyone assigned to run them, eventually squatters occupied the buildings and the money to build them was wasted (Cole 1999). While this an isolated case, there are similar cases occurring around the world when lack of education and local empowerment are major issues.

4.5.2 Stage 2: Construction

I would argue that a fitting example of the construction phase of tourism development would be in the location of my own field study, the Perhentian Islands. I will go much deeper into my case in the next section, but I will mention that despite the fact that tourism has increased more than ten fold over the past two decades, ownership of the majority of tourism related enterprises has remained local to the islands (Hamzah &Hampton 2012). In this case, much of the development decisions are decentralized and village meetings are held monthly to discuss upcoming developments. The residents themselves privately own the majority of the land on the islands, and through deliberation and planning they have kept the titles to most of the land, despite offers from large hotel chains, in order to remain in control of the development process (Interview #5). After discussing with several of the locals in the Perhentian Islands, they are very welcoming to tourism on their islands, but they want tourism to develop on their own terms and at their own pace.

4.5.3 Stage 3: Urbanization

It is not hard to imagine a tourist destination that has reached the urbanization stage of tourism development. Large resorts with huge pools and sky scraping hotels scattered along the beaches seems to be the endgame result of a tourist destination if it is popular enough. However, urbanization and large resorts usually means the presence of multi-national corporations that direct their profits out of the local economy. Furthermore, the case usually is, the more real estate that gets bought up by foreign owners, the less autonomy the locals can retain. While there are several locations that I could use as examples for this, I decided to use the Langkawi Islands in Malaysia, due to it being in the same country as my field study location, giving it roughly the same institutions and regulations.

Before the wave of tourism hit, Langkawi had a similar economy to the Perhentian Islands, relying primarily on fishing for income and sustenance supplemented with some small-scale agriculture. In 1987, the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) was created and the island was declared a duty-free zone, which was the impetus for tourism development (Halim et al, 2011). Alcohol carries a fairly high tax-rate in Malaysia, especially compared with other South-East Asian countries, and the duty-free zone made the island more attractive for the Western, party traveller market that has been so widely recognized just North of the island in Thailand. As the popularity of the island rose, so did the presence of international hotel chains, confining the majority of the locals to the bottom sectors of the tourism economy. In 2007, LADA turned the island into a Global Geopark in an, "attempt to ensure the conservation of Langkawi's national resources, as well the enhancement of local community livelihoods, in the midst of a period of rapid tourism development" (Halim et al., 2011). The rhetoric surrounding the motivation for the Geopark frequently mentions the participation of local stakeholders as being key for improving the livelihood of the people. Furthermore it is emphasized due to the cultural and heritage based direction of tourism development on the island, public education initiatives are crucial as "geoheritage sites in a geopark provide a real-world classrooms for children and adults" (Norzaini et al., 2011). Thus, it is imperative that the locals are well informed about their heritage and can express themselves in English to the tourists.

Chapter 5: My case - The Perhentian Islands

5.1 Background

The Perhentian Islands are a group of 9 islands off the Northeast coast of Malaysia, 19 kilometers from the mainland. Only two of the islands are inhabited, Perhentian Besar and Perhentian Kecil, with the islands' names literally translated meaning big and small respectively. The large island is more inhabited with hotels and resorts, while the hotels are high class for the region; they are still quite modest compared to Western standards with the most expensive rooms going for 100 US Dollars a night. For example, there are no hotels on the islands with the facilities of a pool or gym. On the small island, Kecil, it caters to the backpacker lifestyle more with very reasonably priced chalets and bungalows on the beach, several dive shops, and a few beach bars made from bamboo. There are a total of about 1000 rooms between both islands as of 2010 (Department of Statistics 2010). The small island also has a fishing village, or "kampung", composed of roughly 1300 inhabitants. The kampung is where the majority of the local people live, but there are only two small chalets with a total capacity of 10 rooms, which explains that it is not the real tourist attraction of the island.

The Perhentian Islands belong to the state of Terengganu, the poorest state in Malaysia, where roughly 20% of the population lives below the poverty line (Department of Statistics 2010). The men on the islands have customarily been fishermen, but since the "discovery" of the islands as an exclusive tourism destination in the late 1980's, much of the locals to begin engaging in the tourism industry. Many of the men have switched from fishermen to "boatmen" or boat taxi drivers and snorkel guides. Many of the women who were formerly housewives, have began to work in hospitality at the chalets and hotels, working as cooks in food stands and restaurants, or owning small convenience stores (Ghani et al, 2011). According to the most recent census, 80% work in the tourism sector and 20% work in the public sector and retail traders (Besut District Council, 2012).

While significant growth has occurred on the Perhentian Islands in the last two decades, it has still remained on a much smaller scale than aimed for by the Terengganu state government, who has pushed to get rid of the small chalets to make room for larger, high budget hotels and resorts (Hamzah & Hampton, 2012). The

Perhentian Islands has retained its local ownership and values, while still being dynamic in its adaptation to the new demand for tourism, making it an interesting case in this study. There must be some reasons why the Perhentian Islands have not become another commercial island like the other duty-free island of Langkawi in Malaysia or most of Thai islands to the north. One could make the case that tourism development on the islands is still relatively young, however I would argue that the local population's active participation in the development of their island and their insistence on retaining ownership has allowed them to develop at their own pace, while still adhering to their own cultural customs and values.

5.2 Ecoteer

As previously mentioned, Ecoteer is a volunteer tourism NGO that has several programs across South-East Asia dealing with environmental conservation and development. The first program on the islands started with a turtle conservation project on the big island, Perhentian Besar. Volunteers and staff would come over to the village once a month to teach the kids about turtles and environmental conservation, and in 2011 the founder, Daniel Quilter, decided to expand to open a new project in the village based on community development and environmental conservation alike (Ecoteer, 2013). Volunteers come for a minimum of one week at a time, and the schedule therefore runs in 1-week cycles with certain tasks reoccurring every week, such as English clubs, Eco club and community gardening. Other tasks such as mural painting, construction work and beach clean ups occur as needed.

5.3 Community Participation and Empowerment in the Perhentian Islands

As mentioned quite extensively in the previous chapter, community participation is an essential characteristic in tourism development. However, its role does not stop at development planning and direct democracy, community participation can also be utilized for business ventures and economic gains as well.

5.3.1 Perhentian Islands Lady Association (PILA)

Volunteer organizations do not have to be only about having volunteers teach English and the generic activities that one would expect from such an organization. While those things are undoubtedly good and indeed important, the potential of volunteer organizations is much more than that. The knowledge, network and resources required

to set up and manage a volunteer organization are skills that can be very beneficial to developing communities if used in the right ways. An example of this would be the Perhentian Island Ladies Association, which was set up by Ecoteer. Many of the women on the Perhentian Islands are housewives and could use extra money, as most families have several children. While most of the women are poorly educated in the fields of language and business, almost all of them are great cooks and enjoy making food for family and friends. Ecoteer discussed with some of the women in the village about having a traditional Malay dinner once a week with Ecoteer's volunteers. Instead of eating at a restaurant, volunteers would put on traditional Malay skirts, called sarongs, and eat dinner in the house of a local family Malay style, while sitting on the floor and eating with one's hands. This would bring in some extra income for the host family and a rotation was started with families that wanted to participate (Long, 2013). This served as a pilot test and worked out so well, that while I was volunteering, we designed flyers to be handed out and posted at different hotels around the island. This not only brings money to the families hosting the dinner, but all of the tourists from the hotel need to be transported by taxi boat, generating another opportunity for profit. However, this would not be possible with only a couple families, as nobody wants to have a restaurant in their homes every night, but with the community working together they can share the workload and all profit together. When I interviewed one of the women from PILA and asked her about some of the positive effects of tourism on the islands she responded:

> *"Some positive effects are of course the economic factors, I can make extra money from doing laundry and hosting Malay dinners, and as I mentioned earlier the interaction with foreigners helps me to learn English and understand the cultures of others."* –Informant #1, PILA member

5.3.2 The Bakery

The Malay dinner initiative received positive feedback from both the hosts and the guests, but hosting dinner once or twice a week was not enough to make a large difference in the incomes of the participating families. With the women's network already created and the availability of the ladies during the daytime, while the children are at school and the husbands are at work, Ecoteer proposed to expand the venture and start a bakery. However, the initial investment needed for ovens, stoves, kitchen utensils and everything else needed to start a bakery was quite large in

relation to the disposable income of the ladies in PILA. Ecoteer and the ladies association approached the Marine Park for funding and were informed that their budget came from the UNDP and that they had allocated funds for community programs. Ecoteer helped PILA draft an application and in January 2013 the grant money came through to provide the equipment for the bakery. Ecoteer then sponsored the uniforms, food labels, website and initial ingredients (Long, 2013). After deliberation with the head of the village, PILA was allowed to use the community hall for their bakery when it was not needed. Consequently, all the kitchen equipment was placed on rollers and can be moved into storage when the hall is needed for other purposes. The bakery is 100% run and owned by the women, the role of Ecoteer in all of this was merely presenting them with an opportunity that they were unaware was available and helped with logistics of accomplishing this goal. The end result is the empowerment of these women, allowing them to make their own money and run a business in a traditionally male-dominated society with few women's rights.

Picture 1: PILA's Bakery in the Community Hall. Kampung, Perhentian Islands

5.3.3 Boatman Association

First and foremost, the main reasons the Perhentian Islands were made into a marine park is to preserve the beautiful coral reefs that surround the islands and protect the turtles that come there to lay eggs. Yet, due to lack of knowledge or responsibility, the coral reefs continue to get damaged by tourists and the turtle population is dwindling. Many people are unaware that corals are living organisms that are very sensitive to the oils and bacteria carried by humans. The slightest touch can kill large portions of

the coral and it can take decades to grow back (Diedrich, 2007). Furthermore, one of the most popular attractions on the snorkel tours is to go to Turtle Bay and watch turtles feeding on sea grass. However, tourists often get very excited at finding a turtle and often want to touch it, hold on to its shell, and take pictures with it, without knowing that this type of behavior is extremely stressful to the turtles. When one of the boatmen was asked about his opinion on what should be improved on the Perhentian Islands, he responded:

> *All the government agencies should create awareness for boatman to look after the corals and inform the tourists.* –Informant #4, Boatman

Few of the tourists realize that when a female turtle is pregnant and becomes stressed, she will release her eggs in the water and they will never come to hatch, which is a devastating consequence, due to the fact that turtles are already endangered from poachers and fishermen. The boatmen are aware of this problem and took it up in a meeting that the informal boatmen's association holds regularly. One of the boatmen invited Ecoteer to the meeting and when the problem was brought up, there were many ideas floating around as how to solve it. Almost all of the boatmen speak some English, but it is at a very basic level and most of the time limited to keywords used in tourism. Consequently it is difficult for them to explain to the tourists what they should and should not do. An idea was brought forth to hand out flyers to tourists as they enter the island or when they go on snorkel tours, but after some consideration the idea was declined, due to the fact that cleanliness is already an issue on the islands and many people often throw flyers on the ground and not in trash cans when they are done looking at them (Long, 2013). Finally as a more environmentally friendly and practical solution, Ecoteer volunteered to loan out its laminating machine and printer to print out some "Do's and Don't's" laminated sheets to hand out to the boatmen, who will then pass it out to their passengers on the boat rides and then collect them again before arrival to the destination (Long, 2013). While this initiative was brand new during my field study and the effects of it are hard to quantify, it maintains to show that community participation and the involvement of volunteer organizations can come up with practical solutions to economic and environmental problems alike.

5.4 Education and Human Capital
Living in the 21st century, it is hard to make a legitimate argument against the link

between human capital and economic growth. Investments in education prepare the young population for occupational specialization and promotes innovation. However, it is also known that in developing countries, the quality of education in rural areas is sometimes subpar compared with the metropolitan areas, which is sometimes referred to as an urban bias. When interviewing one of the elementary school teachers, I asked what could be improved the most on the island, to which he responded:

I think about the school, there is a lack of resources and reading material for the kids. –Informant #10, Teacher

Furthermore, educational curriculum is normally conformed to a national standard, ignoring the special needs of certain regions. In this area, volunteer tourism can be utilized to fill the gaps in the education system to help secure the livelihood of the children. In the Perhentian Islands, Ecoteer holds after school clubs in English and Environmental studies for 4th, 5th, and 6th graders, ranging 9-12 years old.

5.4.1 English Club

Many of the families living on the Perhentian Islands have lived there for generations. While on my field study, I asked several people if they ever planned to leave the islands and all of them responded roughly the same way: that the islands were their home and they enjoyed living there, so they had no plans to leave. If their children grow up with the same mindset, then it is probable that most of them will work within the tourism sector and knowledge of English is a huge advantage. I interviewed two of the local elementary school's English teachers in English, and unfortunately the quality of their English was disappointing to me. In both interviews, which consisted of an introduction about my project, followed by ten open-ended questions, the entire interview was finished in less than 10 minutes (Interview 12 & 13). The average time of the other interviews was between 30 and 40 minutes. The short length of the teacher interviews and their struggles with forming simple responses leads me to believe that quality of English education on the island is quite poor. Having volunteers create the lesson plans and teach after school English clubs have several benefits for teaching the children and motivating them to participate. The eclectic backgrounds and experiences of the volunteers leads to great variation in lesson plans and teaching styles resulting in greater participation and attention paid by the students. Furthermore, the rapid turnover of volunteers keeps the children intrigued,

as they constantly get to meet new volunteers/teachers who are also excited to meet and interact with the children, as their time is limited and the majority of volunteers want to get the most out of the experience. This is effective in battling the monotony of the conventional classroom, and the results speak for themselves with upwards of 30 students coming to each English club. This alternative method of additional after-school education, in my opinion, not only teaches students much needed skills from a variety teaching methods, but also introduces the children to foreign culture and helps with English comprehension by hearing English in a variety of different dialects.

5.4.2 Eco / Environmental Club
Taking care of the environment is important the world over, but in a small island community that is dependent on the majority of its income from tourism, the priority is even higher. It is in the best interest economically, aesthetically and intrinsically for the locals to strive to preserve their precious environment. Two of the largest environmental issues on the island are that of waste management and protection of the marine habitat, including everything that lives in it. Beginning with the former, waste management is incredibly important on the island as there are no landfills, therefore all trash must be picked up by boat. As of March 2013, there were no garbage sorting initiatives or recycling occurring on the island, with all of the garbage being thrown into the same pile. Due to adverse conditions or poor scheduling, the trash collection boat often gets delayed and garbage begins piling up around the island.

Much of the garbage being thrown out is organic food waste that can be used for composting. Ecoteer found a donor in 2012 to donate a composting machine to the school that can convert food waste to fertilizer in 24 hours. This compost machine is open to the village to use; all it needs is people to take the initiative to use it. Ecoteer uses the Eco club as a channel to reach the people of the village about this opportunity by teaching the children about the benefits of composting. Out of the 13 interviews conducted, 4 of the respondents mentioned composting as one of the activities promoted by Ecoteer, which shows that recognition of composting is growing (Interviews 1, 4, 6, & 7). Through composting, not only will there be less garbage to dispose of, but the garbage can be transformed into a catalyst for new food production in the home gardens around the village or even sold to the resorts across the islands.

Picture #2 – Main Beach – Fishing village

Picture #3 – Barge overflowing with garbage

Pictures #2 and #3 show the resulting conditions when the boat does not arrive on time. During the monsoon season, the boat may not show up for months at a time due to weather conditions (Long, 2013).

In Picture #2, it shows the garbage being burned, including all of the plastic bags and bottles, creating noxious fumes just 30 meters away from the Elementary School.

Picture #3 is one of the barges that the resorts use to store their garbage while it's waiting to get picked up. When pick up is delayed, the barge begins to overflow and the trash falls into the ocean, polluting the water.

The second major theme of the Eco club is protection of the marine habitat surrounding the island. As mentioned before, the Perhentian Islands are famous for its beautiful beaches and dive sites that surround the island, with the main attraction for snorkelers and divers being the sea turtles, which use the islands as nesting grounds. Due to the fact that the Ecoteer program started with a turtle conservation program, much focus is put on protecting the struggling species. It has been tradition for generations on the island to eat turtle eggs, with locals claiming they are very high on protein and give an intense energy boost for 1-2 days after eating just one egg. As a result, poachers skim the islands each night for eggs and sell them for up 3 US dollars per egg. Cultural traditions are notoriously hard to break, but the strategy of Ecoteer is

that if the children can get educated about the consequences of such practices, hopefully the market for turtle eggs will shrink and the poachers will have no incentive to continue in the future. Once a month, the Eco club goes on a snorkel trip around the islands, giving the children first hand knowledge about the turtles, the coral, and the different species of fish that surround their island. Creating a bond with the children at an early age with their local habitat will hopefully encourage them to take the necessary steps to conserve it.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The Perhentian Islands is proof that the conventional tourism development, dictated by top-down hierarchies and centralized decision making, is not the only path to development. The benefits from tourism do not need to "trickle down" to the lower castes of society, but rather can splash up through the community as water does from a geyser. Politicians and technocrats can point at countless numbers of university degrees or statistics figures in the pursuit of legitimacy in justifying centralized development decisions, but the bottom line is that the complex network of stakeholders in a rural community, with their different cultures, ideals, and interests cannot possibly be all represented by a single person living in a capital city, sitting behind a desk. Too often is local knowledge disregarded as irrelevant and formal education taken as absolute truths. The Western world credits much of it success on the presence of democracy, however that democracy becomes too often increasingly non-existent in peripheral locations including, but not limited to, islands. Lack of education inhibits the probability of participation and lack of participation inhibits the probability of empowerment. Through the endorsement of participation and education, local communities can take control of their own development and future, increasing the quality of life through ownership and empowerment.

A common metaphor used in describing stages of development is a ladder that can be climbed as development progresses. Poverty tends to have a cyclical, reinforcing effect on communities and individuals, with the hardest part of breaking the cycle being to reach the first rung of the development ladder. The emphasis on inclusionary growth achieved through participation and education is important to transform the vicious cycles of poverty to become virtuous cycles of prosperity. The people of the Perhentian Islands have succeeded in retaining autonomy and ownership in tourism

development, and while they may not be able to hold off the encroachment of large tourism enterprises forever, this retention in ownership will hopefully be the impetus to drive the community up the development ladder. If continued focus is put into education, giving the children the skills needed to innovate and become entrepreneurs, then the future of the island's children may not need to be dependent on tourism in the future, due to the availability of other opportunities outside of the islands.

Some forms of alternative tourism, such as ecotourism and volunteer tourism, can be beneficial for community development if executed correctly. My first hand experience with a volunteer organization in the Perhentian Islands has given me optimism about the potential such organizations have in pooling knowledge and experience in developing tourism communities around the world to maximize the benefits from tourism for the citizens participating in it. The experience I received as a volunteer tourist has been priceless in teaching me about their culture and way of life, and I hope that my efforts as a voluntourist and a researcher have helped or will help to improve the quality of their lives and the lives of people in their similar situation. While critics of volunteer tourism say that the individual effects of a volunteer tourist are small, they are indeed larger than those of the conventional tourist. If ecotourism and volunteer tourism continues growing and good standard operating procedures are enforced, progress can be made in minimizing the negative effects of tourism and maximizing the benefits for host communities around the world.

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Appendix I: Interview Guide

Question 1: How old are you and what is your occupation?

Question 2: What comes to mind when you hear the word ecoteer? Do you know what ecoteer does in the village?

Question 3: Have you or any of your children been directly affected by ecoteer?

Question 4: What do you think about tourism; would you like more tourists to visit the island?

Question 5: What are the positive and negative influences from tourists

Question 6: Have you noticed any changes in the village as a result of ecoteer's presence?

Question 7: Do you feel that your quality of life has changed as a result of increased tourism on the islands? (Income, environmental & social effects, physical & mental well-being, education, and recreation all together in one.)

Question 8: Do you support that the Perhentian Islands is a marine park and that fishing is not allowed (for locals most of the year)?

Question 9: Does anyone in your family work as a fisherman? Has this number changed in the past 10 years?

Question 10: What are the biggest problems facing the Perhentian islands today?