

LABOUR SKILLS AND FACTORS AFFECTING LABOUR SKILLS IN THE COMMUNITY – BASED TOURISM SECTOR : A CASE STUDY OF THE CIVIC GROUPS IN THE UPPER NORTHERN REGION (CHIANGMAI PROVINCE)

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ABSTRACT

The Upper Northern Region of Thailand has an abundance of tourist attractions, many of them located in Chiang Mai Province. A striking feature of the tourism industry administration system at community level in this province is the increasing involvement of civic groups.

The objectives of this research were to study the personal and organizational skills of civic groups involved in the tourism industry in Chiang Mai. The research also studied the factors and conditions related to skill development of the civic groups. The research was conducted with experienced members of the communities studied acting as co-researchers.

Seven civic groups located in Chiang Mai Province were studied.

The results of the case studies were:

1. Organizational Skills

- (I) Strategic planning skills – civic groups do not engage in strategic planning. Generally, their work is done according to the agreement of the Community Council and adjustments, if necessary, are made piecemeal.
- (II) Management skills – Hierarchical and client-patron relationships associated with traditional Thai society still dominate social capital and culture. There is no understanding of modern organizational principles and practices.
- (III) Administrative skills and practices – These are based on multilateralism. Such knowledge and skills are picked up from interacting with the tourists and tourist related agencies.

In terms of skill development, it was found that community groups expressed a readiness to learn, a willingness to adjust their views, and a willingness to engage in sustained efforts to develop new or existing skills. Moreover, skill development was highly possible due to the willingness of state agencies, the private sector and NGOs to be of assistance.

2. Individual Skills

- (i) Technical skills – these skills have been accumulated as a result of personal interest and experience gained from working with tourists and supporting agencies. Some of the skills have been handed down from the previous generation of community members.
- (ii) Human relationship skills – these represent the Thai cultural capital and are generally associated with the Thai national identity which is based on values of hospitality and friendliness. These are generally passed on through primary and secondary socialization processes.
- (iii) Thinking skills – these skills have emerged or have been created by community groups or leaders.

In terms of skill development, the key factors and conditions are a strong personal interest in self-improvement, and a rich community culture based on traditional wisdom.

The research made the following recommendations:

- (i) Organizational skills should be developed, especially (a) strategic planning skills (b) organizational management skills – data management skills and use of computers to systematize data collection and analysis (c) administrative skills and practices including marketing skills.
- (ii) Individual thinking skills should be developed.

The following guidelines to improve tourism related skills at community level were identified:

- (i) Individuals and communities – self-improvement through enhanced multilateral co-operation.
- (ii) State agencies – skills development of local communities should be incorporated into all planning activities. Educational institutes could play a leading role and should extend educational networks accordingly.
- (iii) Business sector and NGOs - these should develop clear objectives to assist in skills development of civic groups and participate in relevant networks.