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Floating Markets: Balancing the Needs of Visitors as a Tourist Attraction and Locals Way of Life. A Case Study of Talingchan Floating Market, Bangkok Thailand

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Abstract

A floating market in Bangkok and its vicinity in the Thai Central plains is usually packed as a tourism product that offers visitors an opportunity to experience local ways of life as in the past. An interview and observation were carried out on September 29, 2012 to get the opinion of international, local visitors and local vendors about Talingchan Floating Market. The Talingchan floating market attracts the locals, families, students and international visitors. Results based on observation and analyses of interviews indicate that Talingchan floating market is an authentic canal-side community market, not a thematic floating market village. The results generated a snapshot of both visitors and community sentiments with understanding of the triple bottom line effects of tourism on Talingchan floating market. There is a clear demonstration of the linkage between tourism and canal side community that has played important role in reducing poverty in the area and dispersion of tourism earnings to local community. The researcher sees the market's potential to develop further provided fresh challenges are adequately addressed without damaging culture and environment by making necessary changes to present it as an attractive tourist attraction and to ensure its future sustainability.

Keywords: Floating market, Talingchan, sustainability, tourism, local community

1. INTRODUCTION

Rivers and canals are synonymous with Thai life and culture which are closely associated to rivers as source of food, transport and relaxation (TAT, 2011). Thailand's rivers nurture and support local communities as their traditional transportation channel (TAT, 2010). Gampell (2002, p. 6), explained that 'decades before the advent of rapid transit systems and sleek air-conditioned cars, Bangkok residents travelled the capital's intricate network of waterways in small wooden boats'. According to TAT (2004, p. 1), early encounters of Western diplomats when they first sailed into the ancient Thai capital of Ayutthaya were canals (Klongs) with waterborne communities, thereby dubbing the Kingdom "Venice of the East". Suthitakon, Karnjanakit, and Taweepornphomgul (2012) insists that floating markets have been a famous tourist destination for more than four decades, with 25 well-known floating markets located in the central region of Thailand. Thailand has many picturesque floating markets where goods are sold by itinerant vendors who ply rivers and canals in their boats, delivering commodities to people's homes or meeting to exchange goods in traditional ways (TAT, 2011). Tourism organizations such as, TAT, travel agencies, tour operators as well as hoteliers have successfully marketed and promoted floating markets in Thailand. Floating markets have a special place in travel publications and post cards and have been an indispensable part of a local sight-seeing itinerary. Floating markets have continued to draw attention of international tourists by offering unique Thai experience. The community also benefits from the sales of local products and services for tourists. Boonratana (2011, p. 55) claims that floating markets and community markets are very popular day-trip destinations for urban dwellers and international visitors alike. Probably, the overabundance of fruits and vegetables which matches the continuous demand have led to the existence of floating markets.

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Early origin of Thai settlers along the rivers maintained that people needed rivers for water, rice planting and for commuting in a natural and convenient way in the absence of well-developed road infrastructure. Important festivals of Thailand such as *Songkran* (Thai New Year) and *Loy kratong* are water based festivals. Charoenphon, Rodhetbhai, and Thitphad (2011, p. 62) confirmed that Talingchan Floating market was initiated by Chamlong Srimuang in 1987 to honor King Bhumibol's 60th birthday. This market is situated in the Taling Chan district on the Thonburi bank of the Chao Phraya River. The market is managed by the community committee.

The attractions and services offered by Talingchan community are

- Canal (floating kitchen, boat tour)
- Land based market (production and sale of local products to visitors)
- Provision of local transportation on van, boat and motor bike
- Local food and guides
- Home stay accommodation for visitors

Unlike modern, air-conditioned, sophisticated mega shopping complexes dotting cosmopolitan Bangkok, a visit to Talingchan floating market, not far from the bustling city, gives contemporary tourists the feeling of traveling back in time. Upon arrival at Talingchan floating market, visitors encounter small booths spread around a market area, managed by locals, allowing pedestrians to walk around before arriving the canal. The size of the market is not that large. Majority of visitors are casually dressed Thais and many come from nearby areas. Talingchan floating market remains open on weekends from 8.30 am in the morning till 4.30 pm in the evening. Visitors' entry is free. Currently, there are about 800-1000 visitors per day to the area (Buasorn, 2010, p. 123). It is interesting to realize the importance of canals which were close to Thai life once, but are losing charm fast as mode of transportation because of the construction of modern road networks.

Earlier no rental fee was charged to encourage vendors. In Buasorn (2010, p. 121) view, the market was publicized as an agrotourism site in response to a tourism promotion campaign of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, called 'year of Thailand tourism'. Further, the floating market was widely promoted in the year of 'Amazing Thailand' campaign in 1998-1999 by TAT. Mr. Chuan Chujan took fresh initiatives to develop the floating market in November 2004 when he advised local inhabitants not to sell their lands to the outside investors, who otherwise might transform their land into either housing project or a golf course. He stressed that locals keep their land and pass it to the next generation. However, only a few people were interested in this project at that time.

While the visitors' arrival is ongoing, there is currently little evidence to explore how floating markets continue to sustain operation. A better understanding needs to be developed of how different stakeholders interact, how visitors visualize floating market as tourism attraction, what sorts of recommendations need to be followed to overcome existing challenges. Thus, the research objectives are set as follows:

1. To study the existing tourism development, available amenities and activities at the Talingchan floating market as a tourist attraction perceived by visitors and a community representative
2. To explore local vendors' livelihood issues at Talingchan land market
3. To investigate economic, socio-cultural, environmental and management issues impinging Talingchan floating market in tapping needs of both local vendors and visitors

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Szivas, Riley, and Airey (2003) cited in Naipinit and Maneenetr (2010, p. 104) stated that tourism as practiced in developed countries is essentially an economic endeavor, whereas in developing countries it is mainly about leisure consumption as a path to development. This consumption generates jobs, and tourism may be the only remunerative employment possibility in poor and peripheral regions where few other options are available to people for improving their marginal economic status. Tourism has a high need for human capital and offers a diversity of jobs in a variety of operations of varied sizes and types. Tourism can increase job opportunities for the rural poor in their own communities. It has the potential to help reduce rural out-migration to urban areas, increase employment opportunities for the urban poor and give them additional income to provide for their families in rural areas (Nations, 2003, p. 28). Given its strong economic potentials, tourism has remained an important tool for improving the socioeconomic status of local communities (Jamieson, 2003; Kennedy & Dornan, 2009) cited in Boonratana (2011, p. 49). Many of these local communities are often rural and economically marginalized (Hatton, 1999; Responsibletravel.com, 2007). Some authors (Sofield, Bauer, Delacy, Lipman, & Daugherty, 2004) prefer to use the World Tourism Organization's term 'Sustainable Tourism – Eliminating Poverty'. It not only contributes to economic growth but can also have social, environmental and cultural benefits and costs. 'Triple bottom line' (TBL) is a holistic concept of sustainability where environmental, social and economic objectives are identified concurrently to give balanced considerations (http://www.tq.com.au/fms/tq_corporate/industrydevelopment/Factsheet%201_2-Sustainability%20TBL%20and%20Greenwash.pdf, p.1).

According to Spinder (2013), sustainability will remain a meaningful concept only where it continues to be an environmentally focused concept, and where a systematic integration of environmental issues into other sectors of economy and society is achieved. Further, challenging the basic concept of Three-Pillar model, he reiterated that in actual practice, we deal with completely different systems, issues and tasks that cannot be directly compared and valued. To simplify, harmonization among the three pillars, in context of Talingchan floating market, the study includes three major players' namely visitors, local vendors and community representative. This shows that issue of sustainable development is an ongoing, fluid process, advocates change and concerns everybody.

Even though tourism in Thailand is growing at a faster pace, a substantial number of local Thais have low income and find it hard to make both ends meet. There are certain assets of the poor which can be converted into tourism products. One example is the floating market in Bangkok. In Thailand, there are some floating markets that attract a huge number of tourists, an important source of income for local communities Vu (2008) cited in Huynh (2011). Vending is an important way of involving the poor in tourism. A floating market can uplift the profile of the community. Market binds the community as one identity. According to Marten (2010), creating their own retail vendor jobs and selling at a market are important ways to help people with their financial needs. Locals can sell locally made products, souvenirs', local sweets, hand-made arts and crafts at the market place. Availability and opportunity to buy local products creates commercial platform and scenario for visitors to come, buy, sit, stroll, stop- look_ at the product, enquire price, buy a product and enjoy their time. The visitors' spending support and sustain the local economy.

A market is a place for tourists to spend money, make contact with local people and explore the local culture Hoang and Tran (2010) cited in Huynh (2011). According to Charoenphon et al. (2011, p. 60), 'Floating Market' means a market with trade in the water on cargo vehicle by raft

or boat while Buakwan and Visuthisamajarn (2012) stated that ‘the floating market is a pattern of space to exchange products between traders and sellers and it is the type of cultural tourism that shows the traditional way of life of people living beside the river bank’, where people live. Floating market is packaged as a tourism product and offered to domestic and international tourists as an opportunity to experience local way of life (Jamieson, 2003, p. 78).

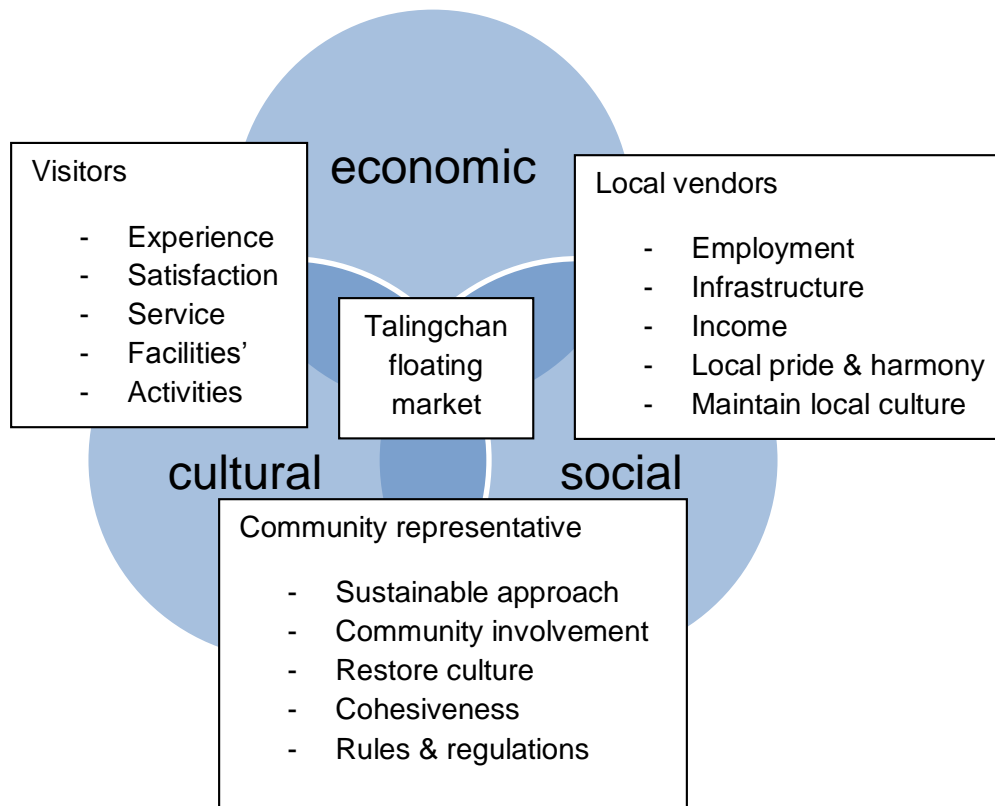


Figure 1 [Balancing economic gains and socio-environmental impacts at Talingchan Floating market]

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study the Triple Bottom Line approach (Figure 1) was used to determine the perception and reaction of 10 visitors, 20 vendors and a community leader regarding sustainability to be more effective.

The first stage of this research was collecting data from secondary sources mainly from tourism literature and the World Wide Web, to gain an insight into the features of floating markets. The second stage involved primary data collection using observation, participant observation (boat tour and visit to two home stays) and an interview checklist.

The Interview

1. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on September 29, 2012 with five Thai females visitors, five international tourists' (two male Chinese, two female Chinese and one female Russian)

The number of interviews was limited to ten due to limitations of time, intentions and willingness of subjects to participate in this study and the availability of subjects on that

day. The ten informants were approached using purposive sampling. Key visitor informants were young tourists as older age visitors were either having their lunch or reluctant to interact with the researcher. A semi-structured interview checklist was used to get the perception of the participants on the following issues: 1) should the number of boats in the canal be increased 2) impact of crowding on visit experience 3) impression of physical surrounding and tourism facilities 4) role of individuals and locals in contributing to sustainability of floating market and 5) home-stay accommodation. All informants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected. The interviews were conducted in English language.

2. Semi-structured interviews with a local community representative Mr. Chuan Chujan in order to gather multiple perspectives on the five issues stated above. The views reflected by community representatives are directly quoted in this study to support the qualitative analysis.
3. To develop further insight regarding vendors' livelihood issues engagement with tourism at Talingchan floating market, face to face interviews were conducted by approaching a convenient sample of 20 self-operators on September 30, 2012.

There was no exact list of vendors from which a sample could be drawn. The researcher introduced himself to some vendors and tenants at Talingchan floating market and shared the objectives of conducting the interview. The data collection venue was the shops of each respondent. All interviews were transcribed. The interviews were conducted in Thai language that lasted for approximately 75 minutes. The main points were later translated into English. The open ended questions covered issues ranging from motivation to start the business, background of business, performance of the business and future outlook.

The data collected was descriptively analyzed and combined with direct observation. The study employed a qualitative data analysis. As Mason (2002) suggested, data was read "literally, interpretively and reflexively". Data was first read literally in order to assess whether there were particular words and expressions that respondents used when they shared their opinion to the researcher. Much of the analysis of the semi-structured interview data involved summarizing the raw data and presenting the results in a way that communicates the most important features.

4. OBSERVATION

The study utilized on-site visit of Talingchan floating market and observation in order to assess and review the context and existing tourism development. The researcher utilized direct observation complemented by taking notes and capturing images of the critical issues of the physical surrounding, visitors' activities and activities of people in the community and their behavior when dealing with local and foreign tourists.

Typically, local people bring out their fresh products from orchards and plantations, young plants, vegetables, fish and various food items such as mango, guava, egg, sweet syrup, Thai noodles, cold tea, different types of flowers, pumpkin carvings, coffee, soft drinks, coconut ice cream and corn to the market, whenever they are available. Visitors can shop for locally made decorative products, sun-dried fruits, orchids, lotus plants, flowers, and handmade handicraft products (postcards, t-shirts, caps, umbrellas). Labels on plastic wrappers are in Thai language, giving plenty of time for non-Thais to guess. Any meaningful conversation taking place between local vendors and non-Thais is rare to find. Almost all hoarding and display signs are in Thai language only.

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The daily life begins here early by giving alms to monks. According to Thai Buddhist belief one gets blessed or prayers are answered by feeding fish. Thais can be seen offering special food for fish as part of merit making, while international tourists do the offering to enjoy the moment. This gives them the chance to click their electronic gadgets to have unusual snap of their day. Visitors can find nearby Buddhist temple to make merit.

There are food shops on rafts (floating kitchen) and boat services cruising visitors along the canal. This gives visitors opportunity to see the lifestyle of people living along the canal. Some visitors prefer sitting at a restaurant along the canal and watch the boats passing by. Many of the boats were paddled by women wearing straw hats. As the cooking is done on some of the boats, weighing machines and all cooking equipment were visible, including cylinders and stove. Vendors can be seen cleaning ginger, before making paste to be added to curry to make it spicy. It is expected that the wastes from cooking need to be disposed of properly, not throwing in the canal.

Direct Observation

Touristic environment (sights sound and smells)
Alms giving to monks
Market vendors’ activities (call out passersby, selling freshly cooked local and traditional foods, local handicrafts and souvenirs on sale)
Existing tourism facilities (sit on floor to eat, floating kitchen/restaurant, parking, and boat cruise)
Visitors’ activities and behaviour (wandering around, shopping for local souvenirs, sampling the food on offer, eating local food)
Classic design, Thai traditional houses along canal
Homestay accommodation for visitors

The land area of the market is limited (200 meters long). Many vendors are accommodated which means that when a group of visitors stop for a while or talk with the vendor, the way is blocked and becomes congested. The parking area is quite limited; therefore, looking for a parking space is difficult. Late arrivals to the market area have no choice but to park their cars along the road adding further to congestion. Someone may be lucky enough to find space but others need to wait or circle the area to find a vacant space.

Participant Observation

A visit to a floating market can be admired by those who appreciate rural life. A canal boat tour can give a glimpse of community life of the people. For those who cannot communicate in the local language, the canal route map is erected on the pier to help visitors locate attractions along the canal route. The wooden boats offer variable but limited sitting capacity. Each boat can accommodate about 15-20 persons and can be hired at 700 baht per trip depending on the route. The trip takes less than two hours. Boats use plastic as the roof to protect boat riders from hot sun and rain. The seats are in fact hard wooden benches uncomfortable for older people. Moreover, the space separating two seats is quite narrow for non-Thais. Announcements on the boat are in Thai language, therefore, either a tour guide should translate the announcements for the non-Thais to understand or Thais on the boat who speak English do the translation. Precautionary measures such as life vests or jackets, warnings or what to do in the event of unforeseen situation were not evident. Overloading is avoided. Boat engines are usually mounted at the back. Navigation is done by the driver who is standing. The speed of the boat decelerates to balance the boat especially when taking a turn. Most of the time, aging engines catches rust and allows oil seepage in the water causing water pollution, which is harmful to the aquatic life and under water vegetation. There are

instances where locals wash their clothes and wash dishes using canal water. This observation coincides with Charoenphon et al. (2011) who also confirmed that floating markets continue to suffer from environmental problems and the landscape along the canal continues to decline. The problems are caused by waste in the water canal.

The canal routes are delightful with the peaceful flow and boat riders can feel the gentle breeze from the opposite direction. One can notice untamed growth of wild grass along the canal route, necessitating the need to trim from time to time, so as not to obstruct free movement of boats. Visitors have the option of buying local delicacies either while cruising or at the local canal side market. There appears to be scarcity of fresh clean water the reason why fresh water pipes run along the canal. To protect the houses from shocks of the waves, special water plants and plastic bottles used as barriers were evident.

Along the canal, usually one can find concrete foot path, with hand railings for protection. Residents were seen walking around or on their two wheelers. They smilingly waved from their waterside porches or rowboats. The plantations around the canal mainly include palm, banana and bamboo trees that could be the reason why there are lots of traditional wooden houses covered with thatched roof on both banks. Being far from the city high rise buildings where space is rare, the availability of open land around the canals attract many Thais to build houses here. Not many houses use air conditioners and they are far from the city, thus, the air is clean. Many houses along the canal appear deserted giving the impression that these houses serve as 'secondary home' for Bangkokians or in the process of selling the houses to urban people, to be used for business purposes, such as home stays. Many old houses appeared to have been renovated to give a modern look. These modern built concrete house structures have erected steel bars as a fence to protect anyone entering their house using the canal route.

Boat trip provides opportunity for the visitors to get off at stops on either bank. Home stay is available for a brief stay or to freshen up. Boat riders can witness the lifestyle of people living along the canal. Home stay is one of the novel projects initiated by local communities for tourists to have a glimpse of the simple Thai way of living. Thai houses which offer home stay services are usually two- storey houses and charge 500 baht per night including breakfast. An air conditioner is installed in at least one of the bedrooms. Visitors can taste local delicacies in the form of sweet snacks, mangoes, guavas and sometimes urban snack as potato chips sold in the vicinity of the house.

5. FINDINGS

Tourism facilities

Based on on-site observation, the Talingchan area is divided in to three sections. The first section is the floating market, the second section is the land market beside the canal and the third section is part of the market separated by road accommodating public lavatories and parking.

Local Thais were busy enjoying food by the time the researcher arrived the market area. Diners sit on the floor using low tables. The market has plenty of sumptuous food sold at reasonable prices. Friendly bargaining is accepted and encouraged. As Boonratana (2011, p. 57) asserts, floating markets are popular destinations for the locals, apparently because there are products that appeal to different ages and genders, and match different budgets. In addition, going to these markets hardly requires any planning. Furthermore, since shopping and eating is inherent nature of Thais, floating markets appeal to them. Vendors usually give positive impression to the visitors. Informants found them service-minded and full of hospitality as vendors greet and welcome

strangers nicely and in a friendly way. Locals always feel proud to share history of home stay and community to the enthusiastic visitors. The community leader agreed by saying “.....Yes. [Those] vendors keep the rules (no litter, no alcoholic drinks) and they tell visitors. Most visitors know about this place. They put up signs too”.

Public lavatories though clean are old fashioned and inadequate according to the informants of this study. Further, subjects reflected that activities for tourists are confined to feeding fish, visiting market for shopping, taking boat tour around the community and opportunity to experience home stay which is in agreement with the findings of the study of Sukkasem (2013) that in order to promote and support local products and services, existing products and resources must be improved and more choices should be offered to tourists.. The local leader is optimistic. In his opinion,

“.... it's getting more crowded, lavatories can be a problem. Now they use the community people' toilets (those who join the market). Sometimes certain sections are more crowded than other sections.For activities, boat trips for different routes are available --whatever you want to do or see. Or you want to be dropped off and picked up at some place at certain time.....Now they have about 3-4 routes of boat trips:

Firstly, [Talingchan] to lotus pond (manual boat—20 Baht/head/trip for 1/2 hour) each boat can take 2 - 10 people, minimum 50 Baht/trip.

Secondly, [Talingchan] to orchid farm 2 to 2 1/2 hour engine boat or to home stay villages, canal tour, or drop-off and pick up trip”.

Home stay accommodation

Based on the researcher’s personal visit, home stay facility is available but it is not a major attraction. Home stay in Thai context, according to Boonratana (2010, p. 288) is defined as “rooms or space within the private homes of community members, offered to guests for a nominal fee, who expects to experience simple rural living or traditional lifestyles, and to interact and have cultural exchanges with the host family, therefore providing a meaningful learning experience for both host and visitors”. Not many visitors are aware of the availability of this facility. A conversation with a home stay owner and manager gave a feeling that he is willing to negotiate the price of stay at his home, if there are no customers. In the community leader’s view,

“..... it's bed and breakfast at 1,000 Baht for 3 and 300 Baht each for more than three. [And] it's not separate or built for guest. It's authentic home stay with the owner--sharing their house”.

Informants, in general, liked it as some observed that the layout is wonderful while others felt it cool and comfortable staying inside. In conversation with a home stay manager, it was found that there are activities for hands on experience for guests such as making Thai dessert and Thai carving.

Crowding

Normally, people expect to find many people at cultural attractions like floating market but how does crowding at Talingchan Floating market area affect visitors’ experience?

One foreign respondent, who had already been to a bigger floating market near Bangkok, feels that when compared to other floating markets, such as Amphawa floating market, Talingchan floating market area is not too crowded. Some Thais said that the market area is limited, so she felt it was crowded. The local representative asserts that,

“.....Since 2009, the market has become famous and has been increasingly crowded. On Sundays there are not enough parking spaces, and not enough seats in shops to eat. Based on one

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estimate, there are over 1000 cars on weekends, averaging three persons per car, thus, the number of visitors' totals 3000 or sometimes 4000".

Respondents were unanimous in saying that the peak visitors' arrival time to market appears to be noon, which in fact is lunch time for Thais, thus, finding seats to have lunch is hard but at other times when it is not too crowded, finding seats in a restaurant is not difficult.

Economic sustainability

After the launch of floating market, the locals and the neighbouring communities created jobs to earn money during the weekends despite little or no skill to operate business. Most of the people who do business in this market are the locals and people from the neighbouring communities. Most of them are agriculturists, farmers and unemployed. When the market operates, these people work either as food or drink sellers, guides and owners of local transportation (van, boat and motorbike). The market is run by people of different ages and gender. Women also work to earn money besides the other roles they play as mothers and wives. Most of the elders are guides and shopkeepers, middle-aged or teenagers are either sellers or employees. The market helps locals and people from neighbouring communities to increase their income and standard of living. The sustainability of the market is important for locals' survival that reduces their migration to Bangkok to find a job. Benefits tend to be dispersed unevenly across the community.

Box 1: Level of involvement of the locals at Talingchan Floating Market

Background

- Business owned before the current one: Most of the respondents (14 people) had not owned any business before engaging in a floating market business, 4 had owned food shop, 1 person had owned fruit shop and 1 had owned souvenir shop.
- Existing business: tour guide, grocery shops along the canal, florists, food vendors, boat operators, home stay
- Education of retailers: Most of them had elementary school education
- Outside help in starting business: 10 respondents had no financial supporter, 8 respondents had family support, 2 respondents had their colleagues support
- Part time or full time job: 17 respondents have part-time jobs and 3 respondents have full-time jobs
- Hours of work: most of them work 5-7 hours per day

Motivation

- Reason for starting business: 5 respondents have limited earnings, 7 respondents had experience in the same line of business, 2 respondents worked as a hobby, 2 respondents are retirees and 4 respondents need additional income

Performance

- Most of them are satisfied with their income (by selling local products, organizing canal tours). Some of them earn 4,000 to 7,000 baht/month

Future Outlook

- Business standing in the next three years: Most of the respondents have no idea about their future. Some of them are pessimistic about their business while some want to expand their business
- Present situation of business: Half of them are happy and satisfied

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- Plan to continue the business: half of them have no idea. Some of them will pass the business to their children or spouse and some will pass the business to their friends or family
- Give up business if offered another job: Most of them are ambitious to do this business. Few will give up

Not many locals are aware of the government or local tourism agency plans or their involvement in decisions concerning tourism development. Those operating businesses here have limited sources of finance and education; they still continue to operate without social welfare and uncertainty about jobs. Self-operators are satisfied with their income. Some of them can earn 4,000 to 7,000 baht per month. These observations match the opinion shared by Chemnasiri (2012) that community members lack knowledge in tourism services and management. It was further opined that distribution of local products can yield more income but they did not know how to improve the quality of services for tourists.

Food and drink shop operators strongly agreed that tourists' spending is very important for their income and livelihood because their business directly depends on tourists spending. Local transport service providers have fewer opportunities for advancement in the future. Many motor bike workers get only their daily wage as most of the money earned ends up in filling oil and filling their stomachs leaving little money to save. Florist operators see more opportunity for advancement in the future than local transporter. Florist operators can earn well and some of them have changed to be wholesalers from retailers as the demand of tourists for fresh and plastic flowers is high. One of the interviewee could manage to export orchid abroad. Some of the florists foresee the future of their next generation in the same line. Most of the self-operators have both short and long term future plans for their businesses such as expansion of shop, hiring employees and opening new branch elsewhere.

The provision of infrastructure and facilities in the Talingchan floating market area provides collective benefits to the whole community because of tourism. The market area has seen changes in the form of public utilities such as road, water and electricity supply. At the beginning, the infrastructure facilities were quite poor but after the market is better known, facilities are added. It makes them feel more comfortable. In the past, nobody thought about the preservation of natural assets but focus only on their survival. But nowadays, natural assets are being preserved because of tourism. Local operators who work at the canal are concerned about the flooding during rainy season.

Conservation of the canal environment versus economic benefits

Should Talingchan Floating market increase the number of boats in the canal to avoid situation of long wait for the boat by passengers which consequently would bring more money to locals? But the experience of the researcher connotes otherwise. The researcher had to wait for more than 20 minutes to board a boat as there were few passengers. The boat needs to be full before cruising. If the boat is not full, the passengers on board have to pay the total price of the boat tour. One of the respondents notes that increasing the number of boats can create water pollution (fuel seepage), air pollution (smoke from engine), and noise pollution (boat engine), thus endangering the environmental condition of the canal. Another Chinese respondent insists that small boats instead of long boats can be added as small boats can be easily maneuvered in the event boat traffic. A local leader commented:

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“.... now they [locals] have two kinds of boats: manual paddle and engine boats. The manual ones--about 5-6 belong to the community with a few privately owned. They need to make sure they have enough income to continue the business. If increase to double, let's say, they might not have enough income to survive”.

Community’s way to maintain and conserve local culture

Subjects gave opinion as well as recommendations to help maintain local serenity and culture. One Thai respondent asserts that the local community needs to feel proud of their culture. An example is demonstrating how to make local Thai food and local products. The Russian respondent believes that the locals should plant more trees. According to the community leader,

“.....They are careful to let the community grow naturally rather than commercially, that is, they won't hire an outsider businessman to run the market. Most sellers are community people and they maintain their daily life activities-- growing plants/vegetables/fruits, farming, gardening, and cooking local dishes. People interact with others in the community for help and giving their excessive stuff. It's giving and sharing culture. Of course they need income to survive. Now they know the market has been giving them extra income”.

Sustainable practices at Talingchan Floating market

The local leader revealed that,

“.....During its first 3 years (2006-2008), it was the beginning stage and critical. Since 2009, it has been well established. People know the place and they keep coming back. The majority are housewives and children. The number of foreigners is increasing too--over a hundred each time. In my opinion, it is sustainable”.

“.... It provides mutual benefits to both visitors and hosts,” remarked one of the subjects citing the use of natural resources for tourism consumption, such as the use of banana leaf and sugar palm leaf as the food container or for serving the food or packaging of the food.

Another Thai observed the preservation of culture and tradition

“.....Thai dessert is hard to find these daysoriginal Thai food, fresh vegetable and fruit from the local farm”.

Some [mostly female informants] exclaimed *“they like it and will come back..... again”.*

According to Abdelhamied (2011, p. 13) insists that customer satisfaction is very crucial for marketing planning since satisfaction does influence customers’ intention to patronize the restaurant in future.

Thai respondents proposed varied ways to sustain the local community such as respect local culture, search information first, before the visit, do not leave anything, friendly with nature, support community by buying souvenir, spread by word of mouth and avoid using plastic bag.

The local community leader recommended the same ways.

“.....Not pollute the canal, no littering, don't over feed the fish, plan to stay longer e.g. use their home stay service to enjoy their way of life”.

6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Talingchan market is popular as a local land based market more than a floating market for tourists because originally, floating market was not established to attract tourists, but as a cultural symbol. In order to promote Thainess, floating markets were turned into tourist attractions. Vajirakachorn and Anuwong (2013) agreed that word of mouth, in the form of internet and social network; contribute to the success of community based tourism, Further, Summaniti, Peerapun, and Paksukcharern (2012, p. 14) claim that all of the floating markets are transformed into tourist

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attractions because of the promotion and support of tourism entrepreneurs, academics, concerned parties and local agents as well as the availability of land transportation for easy access to floating markets.

The popular tourist activities at Talingchan floating market are watching boats selling local fruits and vegetables or boats ferrying visitors, shopping, eating, and strolling. Boat tour ferry around a loop gives a glimpse of old Thai style homes, temples, schools, plantations and huge stretches of undeveloped green spaces and have an opportunity to experience home stays.

Talingchan floating market gives a glimpse of Thai way of life of local community who live along these canals. One can see people use canal water for their daily use, growing plants and vegetation, and using boats to sell local products. Alongside these canals, locals set up a market on weekends to sell recent products and earn their livelihood. In the study of Summaniti et al. (2012, p. 14), they concluded that floating markets reflect farmers' way of life, their social interactions and various products and services they can offer in the markets.

The personal observation of the land based market area gave strong feeling to the researcher that the market area accommodated shops and arranged haphazardly in line with growing demand especially on weekends. To follow up the informants concern that floating market area is crowded, there is a need to find ways to prevent overcrowding and manage smooth flow of visitors to the study site. The physical area in the market place should be organized in a way that spread the visitors throughout the site instead of congregating at few places only. Parking area should be built further away from the land based market area and declare the area close to the market as no-car zone to encourage visitors to walk. Another solution is to introduce shuttle services. Such a move might upset local visitors who always prefer to park right close to the market area as possible, so that they do not have to walk. In Abdelhamied (2011, p. 13) study it was concluded that though parking is a problem faced by customers who decide to dine in floating restaurants, it can influence the decision whether to dine or not at a floating restaurant.

As pointed out earlier that verbal communication between visitors and locals should be enhanced with deployment of bilingual guides and cross-cultural learning and understanding. Such moves can uplift the level of relationship among local community members and its visitors to new heights. The market activities motivate locals to love their land as well as conserve their lifestyle. Many subjects emphasized inclusion of fun or cultural entertainment in the land based market area in the form of local dress, local music, cultural exhibition, fruit carving or organizing local food festival. Based on observation it is suggested to place proper signs in multi-languages and set tourist information center to inform non-Thais about do's and do not's. This is supported by Boonratana (2010, p. 285) who advocated that visitors should be briefed about social and cultural norms of host communities before or upon arrival, therefore, encouraging responsible behaviour.

This study proposes that concerned agencies organize seminar to educate both locals and visitors, especially youngsters, understand the concept of sustainable tourism practices such as limiting the use of plastic, management of waste and keeping canal water clean. One of the respondents was against throwing garbage on land and in canal water. These observations echo the sentiments expressed in the study of Srisuda (2012) who advocated the participation of all sectors in the community in preserving the environment and can provide information about the community and neighbourhood. It was urgently pointed out by respondents towards the need to increase and improve toilets and parking facilities. Similar observations were made by (2006) in her study who recommended twelve measures for sustainable management of tourism at a floating market, including accessibility to the floating market, deployment of security guards at parking lot, regular

cleaning of toilets, food quality measures, and convenient location of a tourist information center and adequate signs which properly guides arriving visitors.

Bicycle trail development is one such opportunity to show case the floating market area to young, enthusiastic international tourists who always complain of the lack of bike riding opportunity on Bangkok roads. Further, offering Thai massage services using local expertise could be an added attraction to the market. Currently the home stays are not suited to all foreign tourists and thus require remarketing. Additionally, there is a need to reassess the whole retailing process such as quality, price, distribution and display of local products. Last but not the least, to avoid any unforeseen situation or accident in canal, safety of the boat riders must be ensured by regular inspection of the conditions of the boats and security of visitors and locals should be ensured.

7. CONCLUSION

Community markets and floating markets have the potential for providing a sustainable income to communities, and are less likely to face risks of stochastic events, changing tourism trends or simply the lack of marketing capacity that many other community tourism destinations typically face. The tourism business should have fair, quality-adjusted profits and local communities must contribute to the sustainability of the floating markets so that they will receive appropriate compensation benefits.

Chemnasiri (2012) commented that to have sustainable tourism, economic growth together with conservation of local culture and environment with community participation and equitable growth together with income sharing should be considered. Talingchan floating market is a case of successful sustainable destination though economic dimensions appear more important for local vendors. Vendors do incorporate and respect environmental and socio-cultural values in operating their businesses' triple bottom line.

Ecological dimensions

- Local community at Talingchan area depends on the canal as the existing natural asset and socio-cultural factors to exploit
- Floating boats, floating restaurants as visitors' attractions lead to preservation and maintenance of water resources

Economic dimensions

- Tourism is consumed at the point of production
- Presence of visitors increase economic growth (visitors spend money which remains in local hands)
- Diverse employment opportunities for local community of all ages and gender as it is labour intensive
- Inclusion of locals in providing direct tourism services (vendors, farmers, florists, guides, boat operators, home stay operators) within environment limits with due regards for long-term appropriate use

Socio-cultural dimensions

- Has ability to offer and establish linkages between visitors and local vendors (visitors explore local culture as enjoyable experience)
- Promotes local culture (traditional floating markets) but protects it from over consumption

The present study has some limitations. The researcher was only able to assess the responses of those international tourists who could communicate in English and most of them were first-time visitors. The views expressed by visitors are valid for Talingchan floating market area only and

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should be compared with other floating markets located elsewhere in Thailand with caution because of differences in topography, and socio-economic conditions. The number of visitors approached for the interview is small and findings are, therefore, not intended to generalize the sustainable practices at study site.

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