Government Agencies Impediments Towards Establishing Pertinence Agrotourism Prospect in Malaysia: Case Study in Jerantut Pahang

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to find the impediments of government agencies towards establishing agrotourism prospect in the case study area. Qualitative interviews were done with semi-structured questions to the involved government agencies. The finding shows that there’s unclear line of communication between involved government agencies, no cross-industry knowledge transfer, undeveloped marketing skills and no usable agrotourism model. Thus, this study will present the current and proposed line of communication among all involved parties to ensure easy information transfer and sharing.

Keywords: Multifunctional Agriculture; Agrotourism; Knowledge transfer

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1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is one of Asian countries that hosted many types of population races and still remained harmonious throughout the century ever since it achieved independent in 1957. Though Malaysia’s location is nestled between Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia, it has attracted various personality of tourists around the world to come visit. Tourism can be defined as activities that are done by local and international tourists that consist of journeys whether it’s a temporary stay trips or long stay trips that seeks for leisure and new experiences (Hassan, 2014). With different types of communities that existed among the many races in Malaysia, it gives birth to the cultural richness of food attractions for both local tourists and also foreign tourists from numerous countries around the world. It has become the tourism department’s mission to promote the uniqueness of the foods and interesting places that tourists can only experience in Malaysia. Due to that, tourism industry in Malaysia has become one of the main contributors to Malaysia’s national income. In 2016, tourism industry has become the third foreign income earner to the national economy trips coming behind manufacturing and agriculture industry (Puah et al., 2018). First established in 1959 under the Department of Trade of Malaysia, tourism industry now has a new home under a bigger jurisdiction called Ministry of Tourism and Culture (MOTAC) which was established in 2013 (MOTAC, 2021). Tourism industry in itself is one big umbrella which has many sub-tourism types under it. Like many other industries, tourism industry also aims towards a sustainable future. With that objective in mind, many versions of sustainable tourism have emerged. There are many types of sustainable tourism that can be listed, however in this study, only agrotourism will be discussed in depth in regards to the case study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Multifunctional Agriculture: Agrotourism

Agriculture industry in Malaysia is not prominent compared to other industries such as manufacturing industry and many more. However, throughout the years, agriculture industry served as Malaysia’s economic backbone when the economy hit the bottom. This can be seen from how agriculture industry contributed to Malaysia’s GDP recorded RM 17.1 billion in 1995 to RM 18.2 in 2000. Even in the Ninth Malaysia Plan (RMK-9), the Malaysian government put more effort in developing agriculture industry with more agriculture-based projects (RMK9, 2006). Therefore, agriculture industry was seen as the most stable out of all other industries. Despite the potential that agriculture can bring to the table, the attraction towards the industry is contradictory. Less participation from youth as the industry players make the
industry mostly consist of old age industry players. The stigma that is attached to the industry also plays a role in determining the number of industry players especially how most of them are from rural community. Be it any industry, rural community is the most susceptible towards economic or environment changes especially if anything bad happened (Amir et al., 2015). Take agriculture for example, as rural community used agriculture as a mean of income however, despite that, agriculture worker has been recorded to have below average income. Agriculture industry offers the lowest wages of RM1,392 per month which was surprisingly lower than those with primary education level, at RM1,518 (Shaharuddin, 2020). Now imagine if any disaster strikes, they will be heavily impacted if they cannot sustain their daily means. The same goes for rural community that works in tourism industry, they too are not spared if there’s a climate change or economic downturn. Thus, if there is another source of income that can be gained alongside the agriculture trade that they currently have, it will be most beneficial. That’s how multifunctional agriculture came to light. Multifunctional agriculture can be defined as more than one existing agriculture trade or any other trade that operated together at the same time. Multifunctional agriculture is able to comprise all three sustainable pillars which is economy, social and environment. Among the example of multifunctional agriculture in Malaysia is integrated farming where two agriculture trades operated in one agricultural area. Cattle rearing in plantation areas enable industry players to gain extra income from cattle rearing while waiting for the harvest of palm oil. Nonetheless, multifunctional agriculture doesn’t limit the industry players towards having only multiple agriculture trades. Multifunctional agriculture also allows industry players to combined agriculture with another industry. Industry players can choose from many industries that has high potential of income. In this study, the most potential industry to be considered is tourism industry.

With century moving forward, the tourism industry is also evolving and tourist preferences are also moving from previously looking into resorts or theme parks to seeking new experiences especially with different cultures, traditions and places. Therefore, to preserve and sustain one’s traditions and cultures, it can be turned into the attraction in tourism industry (Hassan, 2014). It is safe to say, if one cultural essence can be sustained by tourism, there are other opportunities that can be sustained through tourism and this paper will introduce agriculture industry to be paired with tourism industry as a mean to sustain as well. The combination of both agriculture-tourism industries is called agrotourism. Agrotourism can be defined as tourism that interrelated tightly with agriculture industry and served as secondary types of income as opposed to the main income from agriculture businesses. As agrotourism is closely related to rural tourism, it also helps diversify rural activities and lifted the local community socio-economic situation (Ana, 2017; Hamzah et al., 2012).

2.2 Jerantut, Pahang

The most synonym agrotourism attraction in Malaysia is Cameron Highland, located in Pahang. The highland provides the ideal place to grow many types of vegetables or fruits that require cold environment as Malaysia is basically a tropical country. Tourists are able to enjoy many types of experiences such as picking their own fruits or tea leaves and watch how the whole process from farm-to-plate products in the agriculture area. From another perspective, Jerantut (Figure 1), the biggest area in the state of Pahang is also famous for its agrotourism destinations. Jerantut has more greens that its community placement in the area due to the domination of controlled forest area that overtook the area by 89.1%. It consists of 10 districts which are Pedah, Pulau Tawar, Teh, Tembeling, Kuala Tembeling, Hulu Cheka, Tebing Tinggi, Kelola, Burau and Hulu Tembeling. All of the districts make up 720,760.40 hectares of land. Jerantut housed one of Malaysia’s National Parks that hosted many types of natural ecosystem. This served as tourist attraction for those who are seeking nature and experiences. Jerantut is also famous for its plantation area which mostly operated by rural community that reside in the district. Agrotourism is often associated with rural communities hence in this study, Jerantut, has been chosen as the case study. Therefore, the potential of Jerantut becoming an agrotourism attraction place enables agriculture industry player to participate openly into a pertinence prospect for the future. This study then carried out to study the impediments that existed from the perspective of government agencies in establishing Jerantut as a pertinence agrotourism prospect.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology carried out in this study was qualitative interviews methodology. Semi-structured interviews session was carried out among involved agencies. In this study, the involved agencies were Pahang Agriculture Department, Jerantut Agriculture Department, MOTAC (Pahang) and Tourism Pahang. The agencies were selected based on its involvement in the agrotourism prospect that is the main prospect for this study. Though the establishment of agrotourism section is under agriculture industry, tourism industry is in charge of its marketing. However, whether each agency carried out its assigned roles is unknown. As there is no definitive structure that really outline the task for both agencies, this study aims to look into any impediments that hold back government agencies in assisting agrotourism prospect to reach its potential outcome or peak in the case study area of Jerantut, Pahang.
4. FINDINGS

4.1 Unclear Line of Communication Between Government Agencies to Carry Out Agrotourism Prospect

Agrotourism is a combination of two industries that are working together to establish a branch of tourism in which the primary function lies in the agriculture industry. It is essential for industry players to have strong support from both industries in order to realize the agrotourism prospect. Yes, agrotourism falls under both jurisdiction of agriculture and tourism, however, only under Agriculture Department that a section for agrotourism has been set up. Tourism department was assigned to handle the marketing section of the agrotourism prospects.

Upon the research done using interview methodology, the study found out that though the existence of agrotourism prospects were recognized among government agencies, the establishment of proper structure to allow interested industry players to navigate is non-existent. Even under the jurisdiction of agriculture department, the study found out that there were not many industry players that applied for budget allocated for the said prospect leaving the remnants allocation unused and retracted back by the government. Hence, in these circumstances, the information regarding the agriculture prospect is not widely spread. This has become one of the government agencies impediments towards establishing the agrotourism prospect.

Meanwhile, on the tourism side of government agencies, they were aware of agrotourism prospect and recognized the potential that it can bring in the future given that the tourist preferences were evolving, they are only involved if their expertise is sought after. The skills in preparing places, activities and even attracting tourists into the potential tourism area lies in MOTAC and if there is no collaboration between the agencies, agrotourism prospects cannot reach its full potential. As tourism industry relies on agriculture industry for their expertise in agriculture, it is vice versa for agriculture industry to do so. This brings the study to the next finding.

4.2 No Cross-industry Knowledge Transfer

Following the above finding, there are two main industries involved in agrotourism prospect, however the knowledge that one industry held is not shared with the others. That explained how the budget that was allocated was not fully utilized by the state government. Knowledge sharing and transfer is important in ensuring all level of communication so that the same amount of information can be obtained and those involved are able to act accordingly. However, if the knowledge transfer failed, those that shoulder the lost not only will be industry players but all of the involved industries.

The circumstances cause a disruption in creating an aligned communication where industry players that are interested in the agrotourism prospect were hoping for. To establish a sustainable agrotourism prospect, it is important to put
input of information all together from government agencies, industry players and even local community that reside nearby. Each of them plays a crucial role in which if one side of it is unable to carry the vision, the prospect is waiting to fail. Hence, relationship between all parties has to be defined and established (Faganel, 2011). Interesting recommendations by Draper and Murray, (2008) highlighted how not only agriculture industry and tourism industry that involved directly, the involvement of developers and operators are needed as agrotourism prospect will require industry players to provide a safe, sustainable and tourist friendly space that allows local and international tourist to fully explore the area.

As Jerantut Agriculture Department highlighted, aside from the requirement from the agriculture department, they also assisted agrotourism industry players in licensing and building matters. The agency that is in charge in terms of building safety will be Local Authority (LA). Both agriculture and tourism industry will have to seek a license if any of their industry players are interested in agrotourism prospect. Sadly, the last tourism project under Jerantut District Council was on 2016. Thus, all this aspect regarding skills and inputs from all government agencies has to be put into one place and shared among agencies in order to give the best path for interested industry players. However, the finding shows that the information held by government agencies was not shared between them and they are more towards working independently. The situation above pushed most of the industry players that were engaged in agrotourism to work on their own to establish a better prospect for themselves. In any cases, they needed help from any government agencies, they will have to come and ask for help at the appropriate channel. This created an unnecessary bureaucracy, thus those industry players that were interested may not opt for the agrotourism prospect to help sustain their business.

4.3 Undeveloped Marketing Skills to Promote Existing Industry Players

Another interesting finding is regarding the marketing aspect of the agrotourism prospects. Each industry has their own marketing department that is in charge of their own industry players. As Agriculture Department has FAMA, MOTAC has Tourism as their marketing specialist. However, FAMA is mostly in charge of agriculture produced locally and internationally. If the agriculture industry players seek to establish marketing path for their produce, FAMA is the one that can provide assistance. However, FAMA is not in charge of marketing on tourism part. Industry players have to reach to Tourism of MOTAC to get help on marketing section, otherwise, they have to operate marketing moves on their own.

In the case of Jerantut, the Jerantut Agriculture Department took a proactive role in establishing the potential agrotourism players in the area. Approaching the potential agriculture industry players that are interested, they went ahead to assist on the marketing aspects. They blast the details on their social media and even reaching out to the local radio to promote. However, upon interviewing, they did clarify that their marketing moves and strategies do not link officially with Tourism Pahang. Perhaps, if agrotourism industry players in Jerantut received assistance from MOTAC, the marketing effect that can carry the established agrotourism area in Jerantut to the next level. Hence, the absence of marketing moves and strategies by tourism specialists become one of the impediments found in this study.

4.4 No Usable Agrotourism Model

Even if there’s no established line of communication between government agencies, it is not safe to conclude that there’s no agrotourism model that wasn’t used. As agrotourism is considered as part of sustainable tourism, a successful agrotourism has to emphasize on all three pillars of sustainable development which are economy, social and environment. Therefore, if there’s an existing agrotourism model that has been used by the Agrotourism Department, it has to contain all the three aspects.

Therefore, the interviewing was done to find out if there was a specific structure or any usable model that has been used by agriculture department (since the only existing section for agrotourism was under agriculture department). The finding shows that there’s no usable model or structure implemented. This raised a concern over the matter as there are many agrotourism industry players that are proven successful and perhaps, if there are communication between agencies and industry players, a model or structure can be mapped and used for the potential agrotourism industry players. Once it has been mapped, then all three pillars of sustainable development can be identified and improve in order to establish a pertinence agrotourism prospects.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

As per finding above, the study has drawn a mapped figure where all the line of communications between government agencies and industry players that are currently established. The current line of communication is like a puzzle for interested industry players where they have to collect all the important pieces of information and combined it to have a big picture of the prospect. This, in a way, creates a hassle for them and an unnecessary bureaucracy that pose as a big impediment for one to enter the said prospect.
In Figure 2, the respective lines represent the important aspect of agrotourism prospect where interested industry players will have to refer to agrotourism department for agrotourism and agriculture related matter while approaching Tourism Malaysia for marketing purposes and Local Government council for licensing. Some of the actions are redundant, where marketing line can be seen from Agrotourism Department and also industry players. The same goes for licensing line, where all three can be seen coming from different directions.

Instead of operating independently and waiting for the interested industry players to approach, internal knowledge transfer between government agencies is crucial in order to be efficient and strategic (Llusar & Segarra-Ciprés, 2006). Therefore, the study recommends having below figure as the new line structure of communication where all the internal knowledge is being shared around with the involved agencies and become one stop centre where the industry players can have all the necessary answers to their questions in pursuit of agrotourism prospect in Malaysia.

With the proposed line of communication as showed in Figure 3, it is easier for industry players to obtain and share information with Agrotourism Department having only one line of communication. In other word, Agrotourism Department can now be one stop centre for any interested industry player to gain or share information. On the internal side, each respective involved government agencies will place their representatives with expertise of their own. The knowledge that each government agencies hold can now be shared with all involved parties without any of them missing out or miscommunicated. Now that the knowledge has been shared, it can be considered as explicit knowledge where it is transferable and easy to communicate for all government agencies (Cooper, 2018). Thus, all of the involved in making the agrotourism prospect pertinence can now have a smoother line of communication.

![Figure 2: Current line of communication of government agencies and industry players mapped](image-url)
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