

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IN BUM BUM ISLAND, SEMPORNA, SABAH, MALAYSIA

Velan Kunjuraman*

*Centre for Research in Development, Social and Environment (SEEDS),
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSK),
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)*

ABSTRACT

The application of social capital theory or concept in tourism studies is a growing phenomenon, but the studies related to community-based tourism are still in their infancy in the context of developing countries. This study explores the role of social capital in a community-based tourism project in Bum Bum Island, which is located in the District of Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia. The primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with 19 informants from government, private agencies, local heads, tourist, Non-Government agencies and the local community. The results present evidence on the role of social capital in the development of community-based tourism projects. In addition, this research contributes to the enhancement of the body of knowledge studies related to social capital and community-based tourism. Finally, this paper concludes with some practical implications and suggestions for future research directions.

Keywords: Community-based tourism, Stakeholders, Semporna district, Implications, Social capital.

Received: 21 April 2020

Accepted: 21 September 2022

<https://doi.org/10.33736/ijbs.5188.2022>

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the independence of Malaysia, the government has given full attention to agricultural and mining sectors to boost the country's economy and believed that it could bring development to the country. However, the government of Malaysia needed further development and realised that tourism could be a tool and platform to enhance the country's development. As a result, Malaysia began to get seriously involved in tourism promotional activities in the 1970s and successfully established the first tourism department under the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Jaafar et al., 2011). The first tourism agency was called the Tourism Development Corporation (TDC), whose main focus is to promote the country's tourism industry all around the world. To enhance and ensure more effective tourism development performance, the government of Malaysia created the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB) (now called as Tourism Malaysia) in May 1992 to replace TDC. The vision of Tourism Malaysia is "to make the tourism industry a primary source of national revenue and a prime contributor to the socio-economic development of the nation",

* Corresponding author: Centre for Research in Development, Social and Environment (SEEDS), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSK), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), 43600 Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia. Tel: 011-51119947, Email: velan@ukm.edu.my

while the functions of the Board (Tourism Malaysia), Act 1992 are to: (1) Stimulate and promote tourism to and within Malaysia, (2) Invigorate, develop, and market Malaysia internationally and domestically as a tourist focal point, (3) Coordinate all marketing or promotional activities relating to tourism conducted by any organisation, government, or non-governmental agency, and (4) Recommend to relevant measures and programmes to the Minister to stimulate the development and promotion of the Malaysian tourism industry and to implement them upon approval (StudyMalaysia.com, 2015).

Due to the serious attention given by the government on tourism promotional activities, Malaysia has set itself apart from the other tourist destinations all around the world and has become one of the most important tourist destinations in the world. Currently, the tourism sector is an important contributor to the economy and is identified as one of the major sources of foreign exchange earnings and catalyst to the country's economic growth. According to the online report issued by *the SUNDAILY* on 19 October 2015, Malaysia's tourism sector is now the 6th largest contributor to the national economy, contributing to a total of MYR161 billion (14.9%) of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014. Moreover, a report by Malaysian Government stated that, even though Malaysia had faced many unfortunate events, especially involving aviation industry in 2014, tourism industry in Malaysia remained a major contributor to Malaysian economic growth in 2014, with tourism arrivals growing by 6.7 per cent from 25.72 million to 27.4 million, and generated MYR72 billion in revenue, compared to MYR65.4 billion in 2013 (Pemandu, 2014). Most importantly, Malaysia is the top destination among tourists and according to the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia, the major tourist markets for Malaysia in 2012 were the neighbouring ASEAN countries with Singapore (52%), Indonesia (9.52%), China with Hong Kong & Macau (6/23%), and Thailand and Brunei Darussalam (5.05% and 5.03% respectively) (Mosbah & Khuja, 2014, p. 1).

In the meantime, developing countries do not only focus on economic development in the country but also community development (Hussin, 2006; Mensah, 2012; Kunjuraman, 2020; Kunjuraman, 2022). In this regard, Malaysia is exceptional where tourism related initiatives have a significant amount of concern regarding community development. Rural tourism in Malaysia could be an example for community development initiative where rural communities are given an opportunity to be involved in community-based tourism projects in order to enhance their livelihoods (Keling et al., 2021). According to a study by Nair, Munikrishnan, Rajaratnam, and King (2015):

“rural tourism was introduced as a new form of tourism by the Malaysian Government during the Seventh Malaysia Plan period (1996-2000) and is still actively emphasized as part of the national rural development agenda to create employment opportunities, increase income levels and reduce poverty among the rural people, who comprise 37% of the total population” (p. 315).

In this light, since community development is one of the country's visions, tourism is considered as the perfect tool to encourage the rural communities to embark themselves in community-based tourism projects. In Malaysia, there are few tourism products associated with rural tourism such as homestays, ecotourism or nature tourism, agro-tourism, and cultural tourism or heritage tourism. Basically, rural tourism is highly reliant on the natural environment of the sites and became a significant indicator for the promotion of rural tourism products. Additionally, coffee tourism has been introduced as a tool for enhancing rural development (Woyesa & Kumar, 2020). In order to

gain success, the support from internal and external parties such as government, private and non-government organisations are vital to assist the communities in terms of funding, knowledge dissemination, conflict management, and skill training. Moreover, Sebastian and Rajagopalan (2009) claimed that the planned intervention in Kumily, Kerala, India had resolved the conflict between local residents and external stakeholders like the Forest Department. Similarly, Iorio and Corsale (2014) also indicated that consensus and combination of actions coming from local leadership and external actors have been proved that community-based tourism initiative in village of Viscri, Romania overcame some barriers such as lack of financial resources, geographic remoteness, negligible experience of tourism, and lack of knowledge of democratic participatory processes. Thus, all these works ideally refer to the role of social capital (Putnam, 1993) which significantly influenced the success of community-based tourism projects in developing countries.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Social Capital and Community-Based Tourism*

Based on the previous literature, the concept of social capital is well established in the social sciences field, especially derived from the sociology field (Okazaki, 2008). Bourdieu was among the top scholars who contributed to the discussion about the concept of social capital and linked it to sociological studies. In the modern era, Portes (1998) further examined the concept of social capital and its relation to modern sociology. In the early 1990s, the concept of social capital gained serious attention in the rhetoric of development assistance (Okazaki, 2008) and was adopted by the World Bank to examine the potential implications for development theory, research, and policy purposes (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). However, the concept of social capital is already discussed by the researchers but it is still hard to provide a standardised definition and for it to be operationalised (McGehee, et al., 2010). Thus, the concept of social capital is understood as “the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively” (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000, p. 226).

In the previous literature, many scholars have described the concept of social capital with their suitability of study context. For instance, Putnam described the concept of social capital as “features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1995, p. 67). Similarly, Dasgupta and Serageldin (2000, p. 45) provided the similar definition as Putnam (1995), describing it as a “set of norms, networks, and organisations through which people gain access to power and resources that are instrumental in enabling decision-making and policy formulation”. In addition, Krishna (2001) opined that social capital could be realised if the collective action occurs for mutual benefits within a particular community or groups. Lastly, Portes (1998, p. 6) defined the concept of social capital as “the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures”. Based on the previous literature, the concept of social capital has been a central topic for development studies.

Woolcock and Narayan published an article entitled ‘Social capital: implications for development theory, research, and policy’ in the year 2000 which categorised the concept of social capital into four perspectives: the communitarian view, the networks view, the institutional view and the synergy view (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). However, the researchers have focused their discussion mainly about economic development and the effects of social capital. The first view of

social capital is communitarian. This view refers to the social groups and local organisations which represent the clubs, associations, and civic groups. For instance, ecotourism activities in Abai Village, Lower Kinabatangan are fully managed by the village organisation called Community of Abai Project. This organisation plays a significant role in managing community-based tourism initiatives such as the homestay programme and Habitat Forest Restoration Project and it was claimed that they are successfully managing those activities (Cooke et al., 2015). Thus, local organisations in any development projects are crucial for social capital development as indicated by the communitarian views. Moreover, it was also mentioned in the literature that many communities in developing countries are rich in social capital or social ties, but they are still stricken with poverty (Okazaki, 2008, p. 516). The second view is the network view which combines two groups in any development plans. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) note that network view is crucial “which attempts to account for both its upside and downside, stresses the importance of vertical, as well as horizontal associations between people and of relations within and among such organisational entities as community groups and firms” (p. 230). In other ways, the network view explained both the benefits and costs of social capital within vertical and horizontal associations. Rohe (2004) suggested that in order to have an effective development, these two associations should be integrated into the development processes. Third is the institutional view. This view argues that vitality of community networks and civil society is a result of the political, legal and institutional environment. Lastly, the synergy view recognised the integration of both network and institutional views. The author suggested that an outcome of any development consisted of these two views whereby bridging and bonding capital (network view) and institutional view (state-society relation) are vital in the development process.

In the context of tourism, numerous studies have applied the concept of social capital in community-based tourism initiatives both in developed and developing countries (Jones, 2005; McGehee et al., 2010; Karlsson, 2005; Macbeth et al., 2004; Okazaki, 2008). The application of social capital concept in tourism studies is a relatively new and growing phenomenon (Jones, 2005; Okazaki, 2008). Since the tourism industry is an economic industry in developing countries, Okazaki (2008) suggested that social capital could be a significant contributor to the developing country’s economic development and should be applied in tourism development processes in the country. Existing literature on tourism supports that social capital provides benefits to tourism development. For instance, a study by Jones (2005) in Gambia revealed that communities with high social capital have been instrumental in the formation of an eco-camp. In her analysis, both cognitive social capital and structural social capital variables were used to examine the community-based ecotourism project in Gambia. Moreover, using the quantitative research approach, McGehee et al., (2010), tried to examine the tourism-related social capital and its relationship with other forms of capital in Virginia, United States of America. The survey method was employed in their study involving 307 tourism stakeholders representing the four-county region of Virginia to explore their: (1) perceptions of tourism-related social capital of the area, and (2) perceptions of built, financial, natural, cultural, human, and political capital. The results of the study showed that there is a relationship between the length of residence and tourism-related social capital as well as the relationship between tourism-related social capital and cultural capital, political capital, human capital, privately built capital, and financial capital. Based on the results, the study revealed that length of residence had a significant positive relationship with social capital. However, interestingly, the study confirmed that the issue of tourism involvement was not placed in a significant relationship with social capital.

A study regarding the relationship between tourism businesses and social capital was done by Zhao, Ritchie, and Echtner (2011). The researchers applied the concept of social capital to generate an understanding of tourism business development in Guangxi, China. According to the results of this study, massive effects of individual social capital in tourism business is found even though the study noted that the effects vary across different dimensions of social capital concept. The researchers also suggest that the structural social capital variable positively influences both an individual's ability to enterprise, as well as an individual's probability of establishing a tourism business. With regards to relational social capital, the study confirmed that it contributes to an individual's ability to enterprise but does not indicate significant probability to start up a business. Lastly, the researchers noted that the cognitive social capital variable was marginal in the case. The institutional view (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000) of social capital was also detected in previous literature. For instance, Sebastian and Rajagopalan (2009) studied the socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Kerala, India and revealed that 88% of the respondents in the study area perceived that living standards have increased, with 64% relating it to tourism development. The tribal view this as the achievement of Eco-Development Committees, an institutional mechanism established to manage the intervention related to tourism development.

Park, Lee, Choi, and Yoon (2012) studied the factors influencing social capital in rural communities in South Korea. By using an on-site survey, the study involved a total number of 380 community residents. The results revealed that the fruit, vegetable, and rice farmers who operated farm-stay businesses and rural activity programmes for tourists had the higher social capital. Another recent study by Park, Nunkoo, and Yoon (2014) claimed that the higher level of social capital among the Korean residents is not always desirable as it does not foster pro-tourism attitudes. Thus, the author suggests that negative consequences of social capital should be recognised and managed in order to make the community built ways that contribute to sustainable rural tourism development. Another study was carried out by Baksh, Soemarno, Hakim, and Nugroho (2013) that applied the concept of social capital in the development of ecotourism in Indonesia. The study aimed to explore the roles of social capital in the ecotourism development in Tambaksari Village, East Java Indonesia. The results of the study showed that there was a relationship between networking and ecotourism development. The study also indicates that there was a relationship between community participation and ecotourism development but no relationship between norm and ecotourism development. Lastly, the study also revealed that the element of trust did not have any relationship with ecotourism development in the study site.

Based on the previous literature regarding the application of social capital concept in tourism studies, the author came to know that substantial amount of research have dealt with the quantitative research approach (McGehee et al., 2010; Park et al., 2012; Baksh et al., 2013; Park et al., 2014). Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Okazaki, 2008) have been used to examine the roles of social capital in different study contexts. However, not many tourism studies had used qualitative research to study social capital and tourism development. Thus, this has motivated the author to use a qualitative research approach to examine the role of social capital in the development of homestay programmes in Bum Bum Island, Semporna, Sabah. It is worth noting that the concept of social capital is not unidimensional (McGehee, et al. 2010) and has been distinguished between structural and cognitive social capital variables (Harpham, Grant, & Thomas, 2002).

Basically, the structural social capital could be understood as what people usually do (behaviour) whereas cognitive social capital focuses on what people feel (perceptions). Based on the existing literature, tourism researchers have studied the structural and cognitive social capital variables in the rural tourism development (Jones, 2005) and some only focused on cognitive social capital in their research (Park et al., 2012; Park et al., 2014) with less focus on other social capital elements such as bonding and bridging. Thus, this study aimed to fill the gap in the tourism literature and explore the roles of bonding and bridging social capital elements in the case of development of homestay programmes in the Bum Bum Island, Semporna, Sabah.

Scholars like Putnam (1993) and Woolcock and Narayan (2000) suggested that the Networks View can be distinguished and they had recognised the bonding and bridging elements of social capital. According to them, bonding and bridging social capitals are important elements in the formation of social capital. Bonding social capital involves the internal relationship and community ties such as families, friends, neighbours, or groups with similar objectives. Conversely, bridging social capital is explained as a bonding community which reaches out to external groups and institutions outside the community to seek information, resources, and support from those who previously did not interact with one another. In the meantime, bonding and bridging social capitals have been categorised as ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ ways (McGehee et al., 2010). Rohe (2004) claimed that both aforementioned ways should be integrated and required in order to ensure the effective sustainable community development. Based on the above discussion, the current study aimed to probe to what extent the bonding and bridging social capital elements have contributed to the success of the community-based tourism projects in Bum Bum Island, Semporna, Sabah. On the other hand, how the relevant stakeholders play their roles to create harmony inside and outside of the community to enhance community-based tourism projects will also be studied. All these questions were answered in this study and presented in the findings section.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study Context

Recently, Semporna has been a popular destination among tourists because of its beautiful natural environment, especially the islands surrounding it. Semporna can be reached by bus from Kota Kinabalu Town and the gateway to the beautiful islands is located in the Tawau Division on the East Coast of Sabah. Semporna is also well-known as an illustrious scuba diving and snorkelling spot for tourists who come from all around the world. Semporna town, as well as its rural areas, are mainly inhabited by the *Bajau Laut* ethnic community (the indigenous group which is also known as the Sea Gypsies). Some of the inhabitants live in sprawling stilt villages above the water or inside the traditional *Lepa* boats. Prabhakaran et al., (2013) noted that Semporna District has provided with beautiful marine based diversity which has become a great motivation for tourists to visit this rural destination at Sabah. Other than scuba diving and snorkelling activities, Semporna also provides other marine based activities to tourists, swimming and fish-catching activities being among the most popular activities. Moreover, an event called “*The Regatta Lepa*” (traditional boat race or water festival) is held here annually in April.

These activities are offered by tour operators in Semporna and tourists would be able to enjoy their stay here. Among the most visited islands are Sipadan Island, Mabul Island, Kapalai Island, Matakang Island, and Sibuan Island. Realising the potential of tourism attractions in Semporna, the local government has formulated an intervention in order to boost the tourism industry in the state. In this light, the district office of Semporna has listed ten activities and attractions that attract tourists to visit Semporna as indicated on their website which include: (1) Scuba diving, (2) Snorkelling, (3) Island hopping, (4) Picnic area, (5) Staying in Water villa, (6) Archaeological sites, (7) Fishing, (8) *The Regatta Lepa* Water Festival, (9) Honeymoon, and (10) Seafood heaven (Semporna District Office, 2015).

3.2. *Research Methods*

This study was carried out at Bum Bum Island, which is one of the islands in Semporna District (see Figure 1). Two villages in the Bum Bum Island, Look Butun and Gellam-Gellam Villages were used for this case study. These two villages are located in Bum Bum Island. According to the community leader, there are 100 households living in these two villages and they share the same economic activity. The main reason why these villages were chosen is the unique marine based activity practised by the locals at Bum Bum Island, known as seaweed cultivation activities. Seaweed cultivation activity is considered the main livelihood activity in the island and the nearby islands, such as Selakan Island (Hussin et al., 2015). According to Hussin et al., (2015), seaweed cultivation refers to “an activity conducted near to the coastal area and it is largely environmental based and often conducted by the community in that area” (p. 3). With regards to tourism development, the community-based homestay programme is a newly taken economic activity in the two villages as an alternative to seaweed cultivation which is not permanent and ‘seasonal based’. In this regard, hopes are all around for the homestay programme to provide an alternative income source to the local community in the two villages. The homestay programme started in November 2014 and is still in its early stage. Further development is largely required where the local community has started to experience the tourism operation. Thus, this study was carried out to identify the roles of social capital especially bonding and bridging social capital among the tourism stakeholders in the study sites.

Qualitative research approaches through in-depth interviews and field observation were applied in this study. An in-depth interview was held with tourism stakeholders who have stakes on tourism development. The classification of tourism stakeholders is based on relevant tourism literature (Timothy, 1999; Byrd et al., 2009; Marzuki & Hay, 2013; Nair et al., 2015; Hussin et al., 2015) and four groups of stakeholders were identified: (1) government officials, (2) private company owners or entrepreneurs, (3) local community, and (4) interest groups such as tourists and non-government organisations (NGOs). In total, 19 key informants were selected based on purposive sampling technique (Sekaran, 1992) and they are the pioneers that have experience and knowledge for the homestay programme development in the study site. All these informants were approached by the researcher to provide data required for this study. The fieldwork was done from July 2014 to January 2015 in two villages in Bum Bum Island, Look Butun and Gellam-Gellam villages. All informants were asked questions related to bonding and bridging the social capital elements with regards to development of homestay programmes in the study sites.

The interviews contain open-ended questions and the responses were recorded on tapes after the researcher gained informants' permission. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour. Prior to the actual interview session, appointments with the informants were set 1 week prior by calling them on their mobile phones. A majority of the interviews were held at informants' homes, while interviews with informants from government agencies and NGOs were held in their office. Informants were free to decide whether to do the interview in English or Malay, but most preferred and felt more convenient to talk in Malay, except a government official who delivered his opinions in English. After the interviews, all the raw data were analysed using the Ritchie and Spencer's (1994) framework method for analysis. This framework involves five stages of systematic thematic analysis such as familiarisation, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting and mapping, and interpretation. This method provides a useful insight to the researcher during analysis of raw data for this study. After this process, the themes were then cross-checked for accuracy and validity. These were done by an academic moderator (PhD holder) who was present during the research and a process of comparing notes was done to assist the interpretation of data and before a consensus was reached.

Figure 1: Map of Bum Bum Island



Source: Google Image, 2014.

Note: P. Bum Bum in English called as Bum Bum Island.

4. FINDINGS

Through the qualitative method employed, this study has identified the roles of bonding and bridging social capital in homestay tourism development in two villages in Bum Bum Island, Semporna, Sabah. The results have been categorised into two parts: (1) roles of bonding social capital in tourism development from the community perspective, and (2) roles of bridging social capital in tourism development from the other stakeholders' perspectives. Finally, the results were compared with previous literature about tourism development and the roles of social capital and provided implications of the study.

4.1. Roles of Bonding Social Capital in Tourism Development: A Community Perspective

The idea of homestay tourism development was initially introduced by a local community representative and the elected community leader (JKKK) for Look Butun and Gellam-Gellam Villages. The community leader is young and very active in community works, particularly the enhancement of local community livelihood programmes. As seaweed cultivation is the main economic activity in the study sites, it was observed that the activity brought less economic benefits and is 'seasonal activity', he initiated the homestay programme idea which could be an alternative livelihood activity and bring side income to the seaweed farmers in the two villages. He is a native which leads to a higher sense of ownership towards village and local community and he managed to start the homestay programme. The development of the homestay programme in the two villages has its own history where the community leader was challenged by many obstacles throughout the process of the implementation. He revealed the challenges he faced:

"For this village, of course the homestay programme is new. I visited other nearby districts to see the homestay programme implementation and have thought of introducing the programme to my villages. But, it can only be done step by step. I told the villagers that seaweed cultivation needed a frequent monitoring system and most of the time we could not manage so we got involved in the homestay programme. I had planned to set up a homestay programme since 2004 but it was rejected by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Environment Sabah due to unavailability of electricity and poor water supply" (Informant 1, community leader, 2014).

The development of homestay programmes in Look Butun and Gellam-Gellam Villages is at an early stage of implementation and the problems stated by the informants still persist through the duration of this study. However, they still manage to operate the homestay programme which started in November 2014 with the assistance and support by this community leader. This is proven that the high level of bonding social capital within the community leader towards the other members of the villages contributed to the locals engaging in the homestay programme even though they were facing some problems as mentioned earlier. Based on the interviews with the homestay operators, almost every informant agreed that they put high trust in him and he could develop the village with good infrastructure and community well-being. Through this study, with seaweed cultivators as the main jobs, the residents are still under the poverty line and majority of them are living in government funded houses (PPRT). To combat the poverty among the villagers, the community leader has strived to help and support the community by introducing the homestay programme as an alternative economy programme to the seasonal seaweed cultivation in the study sites. The high level of social capital among the informants, especially tourism operators towards

the community leader help the community overcome the current challenges, as well as to boost their interest in engaging with homestay programmes. In total, 10 households have participated in the homestay programme after they are encouraged by the community leader in both villages. This is a good sign as the tourism development in the study sites is slowly expanding, and the local community is starting to be involved in tourism activities as they do not have any experiences in the field.

In terms of freedom of speech and views, the majority of the homestay operators indicated that they have a good relationship with local organisations, especially with the community leader. They remarked that the community leader has been encouraging them to deliver their views especially in the process of homestay programme development. Before the idea of the homestay programme was implemented, several meetings were done in order to get consensus from the local community and expectation of warm collaboration from them. Fortunately, the local community agreed with the idea of homestay programme development and realised that it could deliver economic benefits to them. The community leader shared his experience during the early stage of planning to introduce the homestay programme in the villages. He noted that since the homestay programme is fully based on community participation, it is worth it to gain some early insights from the locals before the implementation stage. He remarked that:

“This is my duty to inform about tourism development in these villages with my residents to avoid some misunderstandings. The introduction of the homestay programme was informed to them and gained some consensus and fortunately the villagers agreed and welcomed the idea” (Informant 1, community leader, 2014).

A good relationship practised by the community leader with the locals has increased the local support for the homestay tourism development, and become a tool for rural community development especially in Bum Bum Island. In this regard, as mentioned by Burt in 2000 *“better-connected people enjoy better returns”* (as cited in Gilchrist, 2009, p. 9). In addition, the qualitative data also revealed that almost every homestay operator in the villages supported the idea of the homestay programme introduced by the community leader and they are very interested to participate in the programme. This is proved by the informants’ responses:

“Mr. A was the one who introduce the homestay programme to us” (Informant 7, homestay operator, 2015)

“The idea of homestay came from Mr. A from this village” (Informant 8, homestay operator, 2015)

“Mr. A has introduced the homestay programme to us, before the implementation stage he has done some briefing regarding the homestay programme” (Informant 9, homestay operator, 2015)

Based on these responses, it was clearly stated that the bonding social capital among the community leader and homestay operators have strengthened their social ties as well as promoting social capital for their future tourism development. Through this study, the author was able to observe the unity among the local community of the both villages. Most significantly, the community has a good social relationship and deep understanding of the other members of the community. This

could be seen during the tourism related meetings and local events. All the members of the community work together and show their support at any local projects especially in the development of homestay programmes. Moreover, the age difference among the members of the community is not a big deal where all of them came from younger and older generations. The youths in both villages have shown support in the development of homestay programmes where they are willing to help their family members to set up homestay programmes.

A majority of them contribute to cleaning the village in order to make the villages clean and free from litter. The older members as always offer their advice to the younger generation to take care of the fellow residents, as well as their family members after their disappearance. Finally, it is noted that the level of bonding social capital among the villagers and the community leader are good as the indicator of successful community-based tourism development at Bum Bum Island. Based on the qualitative data of this study, it is worth to indicate that bonding social capital is vital for the local tourism development in Bum Bum Island and could be an indicator for future tourism sustainability.

4.2. Roles of Bridging Social Capital in Tourism Development: Other Stakeholders' Perspectives

In-depth interviews with the other stakeholders, such as government officials, private tour operators, local entrepreneurs, and other interest groups, showed the agreement that bridging social capital between them and the local community, especially the homestay operators, has been strengthened due to tourism development. According to a government official, tourism development in Bum Bum Island is still new, but tourism has given the opportunity for them to engage with the local community and collaborate together in the development of homestay tourism development. He mentioned:

“Since the homestay programme is a community-based tourism initiative, our main aim is to empower the community through tourism development to enhance their socio-economic status and we are willing to help the community” (Informant 2, a government official from Sabah Tourism Board, 2015).

Through this finding, the government officials are looking forward to building a good relationship with the local community at both villages. Bridging social capital as mentioned previously occurs as community bonding in the rural destination to seek information, resources, and support from outside people to engage in tourism development. The situation primarily happens where the rural community has not interacted with outside people, and tourism development, in the process of bridging social capital, plays a significant role to enhance the cooperation between these two parties. In addition, informants from the private sectors, who are mainly tour operators in Semporna, also claimed that they are willing to assist the homestay operators in terms of promotional activities. They further mentioned that if the homestay programme is to be operated in the both villages with their own unique products, the homestay operators should cooperate with them to promote their products to outsiders through promotional activities. The two tour operators stated their views in this matter:

“Through promotional activities and word of mouth or putting banners as well as advertise to outside people. But, basically word of mouth strategy could have an

impact because people who visited this place probably will recommend it to others in their respective countries” (Informant 5, tour operator b, 2015).

“We are going to help the homestay operators with promotional activities within Sabah as well as outside of Malaysia, for example creating a website where tourists could choose their desired package” (Informant 6, tour operator a, 2015).

The sense of bridging social capital possessed by these tour operators with homestay operators probably motivates the homestay operators to be involved in homestay tourism development with more enthusiasm. Similarly, other informants, such as tourists and NGOs officers indicate that assistance from the outside agencies is vital to the homestay operators as it provides them knowledge on the marketing strategy and experience of tourism management in order to run the homestay programme independently and systematically. The study also observed that the majority of the informants welcome the idea of a homestay programme development in the Bum Bum Island and agree to provide necessary assistance to the new homestay operators in the both villages. The sense of bridging social capital shown by these stakeholders probably could benefit the homestay operators as they could learn something from them in terms of homestay management which are hardly provided by the relevant tourism agencies, due to the geographical location of the island which becomes a barrier for the villagers to enjoy basic infrastructure. By having the homestay programme the current problems could be solved due to the potential tourism impacts to the island.

In light of the development of homestay tourism in both villages, at an early stage operation, relevant experience of tourism management and knowledge, and skills are essential for the homestay operators joining this programme. Thus, external support could be an important platform where these homestay operators are eager to gain support from the outsiders. Based on the observation and qualitative data, homestay operators welcome the outside assistance as they believe that it would bring benefits to them as it would help them develop knowledge and skills related to tourism management since they are ‘Alien’ to this field. To support this statement, the informants from stakeholders’ groups, particularly the government officials, offered little assistance to the homestay operators in terms of knowledge, skills, and resource management. A government official from Sabah Tourism Board and an officer from Sabah Fishery Department remarked that:

“If the tourism product is ready to be promoted, we are able to do some promotional activities abroad such as Korea and Australia and other countries as well. Moreover, we are also able to publish this matter into the tourism magazines where the tourists are able to be aware of this tourism product. Also, the homestay operators are able to receive infrastructure development from the local government such as toilet development whenever the homestay programme fulfils the stated requirements. Moreover, in terms of land application, we are able to assist those homestay operators who are interested in homestay tourism development in the island” (Informant 2, a government official from Sabah Tourism Board, 2015).

Based on the aforementioned responses, the study reveals that government agencies in Semporna are willing to provide support (consultation and skill training) to the homestay operators in developing the homestay programme in the island. On the other hand, the officer from Sabah Tourism Board also indicates that they will help the homestay operators in terms of holding

workshops or talks regarding tourism management issues on the island in the near future upon their successful operation. This indicates that a strong sense of bridging social capital shown by the stakeholders is something to be appreciated as these kinds of support are hard to be realised. The collaboration and support from these stakeholders to the homestay tourism development in the Bum Bum Island could bring benefits to the island development especially infrastructure development as well as rural community development through community-based tourism initiative. Based on the study's findings, it could be concluded that all the stakeholders (government officials, tour operators, NGO officers, and tourists) recognised the importance of bridging social capital among local communities in the homestay tourism development on the island. They also realised and are aware that homestay operators in both villages hardly required assistance to manage the homestay programmes. The assistance could be in the form of education, knowledge and awareness as well as resource management stated by the stakeholders.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated the bonding and bridging social capital elements among the stakeholders in the development of the homestay programme in Look Butun and Gellam-Gellam Villages, Bum Bum Island, Semporna, Sabah. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that bonding and bridging social capital elements among the stakeholders are high and very useful for successful homestay tourism development in Bum Bum Island, Sabah. This paper has made some important theoretical contributions to existing literature on community-based tourism and linked to social capital. Previous studies have given little attention on bonding and bridging social capital elements in rural tourism development and many studies have only focussed on structural and cognitive social capital in their research (Jones, 2005; Park et al., 2012; Park et al., 2014). Thus, this study could enhance the body of knowledge in the existing literature by studying the case in the context of Bum Bum Island, Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia.

It should be noted that the study findings supported the findings of previous studies (Jones, 2005; Okazaki, 2008; McGehee et al., 2010; Park et al., 2012; Park et al., 2014), which found that social capital plays a significant role in rural tourism development. Guided by the social capital theory by Woolcock and Narayan (2000); and Putnam (1995), this study suggests that the bonding and bridging social capital among the stakeholders are vital in order to develop the community-based homestay programme in Look Butun and Gellam-Gellam Villages, Bum Bum Island. Through the qualitative research methods, the author believes that bonding and bridging social capital among the stakeholders in Bum Bum Island could benefit both parties if they sustain the good relationships in the near future. Consequently, the local community, especially homestay operators, highly acknowledged and welcomed assistance in terms of skills and education related to homestay tourism from the other stakeholders.

From a planning perspective, this study suggests that state tourism authorities and district tourism organisations should come up with new initiatives and programmes to enhance the level of knowledge and skills among the homestay operators. In this regard, homestay operators often lack the knowledge and skills in tourism management, hence, proper and effective programmes should be introduced by the relevant authorities. Lack of knowledge and skills in tourism development by the local community could affect the success of the project (Keogh, 1990; Hussin, 2006; Marzuki et al., 2012; Tosun, 2000). Therefore, relevant tourism authorities must put serious attention into

this matter and assist the local community to improve their socio-economic status through developing tourism activities in the study sites. The development of a homestay programme on the island could benefit the local community to engage with tourism related business especially in the homestay programme and could transform their poor life to a better life (Hussin et al., 2015). In addition, this study also recognised that Bum Bum Island has potential to be developed with tourism activities especially through homestay programmes. This will also help the local tourism planners to identify new potential tourism destinations within the Sabah state.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY DIRECTIONS

This study has several limitations. First, this study covered only Bum Bum Island in the District of Semporna, Sabah, but other areas are also relevant to this study as the rural island community in these islands practice seaweed cultivation as their main economic activity. Furthermore, a community-based homestay programme could be developed as a new form of tourism activities within the district. The research used qualitative research approach as the main research design and it comes with limitations and questions of generalisation. On the other hand, the strength of this study is worth noting where this study successfully linked and identified the relationships between the concept of social capital and community-based homestay programmes. Other researchers could conduct similar studies in developing countries and compare their findings with findings of this present study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by Universiti Malaysia Sabah. Many thanks to Prof. Rosazman Hussin for his early comments. I also thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.

REFERENCES

- Baksh, R., Soemarno, Hakim, L., & Nugroho, I. (2013). Social capital in the development of ecotourism: A case study in Tambaksari Village Pasuruan Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia. *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research*, 3(3), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.6265283>
- Byrd, E. T., Bosley, H. E., & Dronberger, M. (2009). Comparisons of stakeholder perceptions of tourism impacts in rural Eastern North Carolina. *Tourism Management*, 30(5), 693-703. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2008.10.021>
- Dasgupta, P., & Serageldin, I. (2000). *Social capital: A multifaceted perspective*. The World Bank.
- Cooke, M. F., Hussin, R., Afrizal Anwar @ Teuku Afrizal, A. N. A. H., Majeed, A. A., Min, J., & Kunjuraman, V. (2015). *A baseline of change: A Socio-economic study of local communities, natural resources use and conservation in the RAMSAR Wetlands of the Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah*. Prima Element Sdn. Bhd. Sandakan.
- Gilchrist, A. (2009). *The well-connected community: A networking approach to community development* (2nd ed.). The Policy Press.
- Harpham, T, Grant, E., & Thomas, E. (2002). Measuring social capital within health surveys: Key issues. *Health Policy and Planning*, 17(1), 106-111. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/17.1.106>

- Hussin, R. (2006). *Ecotourism development and local community participation: Case studies of Batu Puteh and Sukau Village in lower Kinabatangan area of Sabah, Malaysia* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Glasgow.
- Hussin, R., Yasir, S. M., Kunjuraman, V., & Hossin, A. (2015). Enhancing capacity building in seaweed cultivation system among the poor fishermen: A case study in Sabah, East Malaysia. *Asian Social Science, 11*(18), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v11n18p1>
- Iorio, M., & Corsale, A. (2014). Community-based tourism and networking: Visceri, Romania. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 22*(2), 234-255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2013.802327>
- Jaafar, M., Abdul-Aziz, A. R., Maideen, S. A., & Mohd, S. Z. (2011). Entrepreneurship in the tourism industry: Issues in developing countries. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 30*(4), 827-835. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2011.01.003>
- Jones, S. (2005). Community-based ecotourism: The significance of social capital. *Annals of Tourism Research, 32*(2), 303-324. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2004.06.007>
- Karlsson, S. E. (2005). The social and cultural capital of a place and their influence on the production of tourism - A theoretical reflection based on an illustrative case study. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism, 5*(2), 102-115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250510014408>
- Keling, W., Ho, P. L., Yap, C. S., & Entebang, H. (2021). Impacts of the Tagang programme on an indigenous Dayak community. *Anatolia, 32*(3), 456-469. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2021.1886954>
- Keogh, B. (1990). Public participation in community tourism planning. *Annals of Tourism Research, 17*(3), 449-465. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(90\)90009-G](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(90)90009-G)
- Krishna, A. (2001). Moving from the stock of social capital to the flow of benefits: The role of agency. *World Development, 29*(6), 925-43.
- Kunjuraman, V. (2020). Community-based ecotourism managing to fuel community empowerment? An evidence from Malaysian Borneo. *Tourism Recreation Research, 47*(4), 384-399. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2020.1841378>
- Kunjuraman, V. (2022). Local community participation challenges in community-based ecotourism development in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo. *Community Development Journal, 57*(3), 487-508. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsaa065>
- Macbeth, J., Carson, D., & Northcote, J. (2004). Social capital, tourism and regional development: SPCC as a basis for innovation and sustainability. *Current Issues in Tourism, 7*(6), 502-522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1368350050408668200>
- Marzuki, A., & Hay, I. (2013). Towards a public participation framework in tourism planning. *Tourism Planning & Development, 10*(4), 494-512. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2013.804432>
- Marzuki, A., Hay, I., & James, J. (2012). Public participation shortcomings in tourism planning: The case of the Langkawi islands, Malaysia. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 20*(4), 585-602. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2011.638384>
- McGehee, N. G., Lee, S., O'Bannon, T. L., & Perdue, R. R. (2010). Tourism-related social capital and its relationship with other forms of capital: An exploratory study. *Journal of Travel Research, 49*(4), 486-500. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287509349271>
- Mensah, C. (2012). Residents' perception of socio-economic impacts of tourism in Tafi Atome, Ghana. *Asian Social Science, 8*(15), 274-287. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v8n15p274>
- Mosbah, A., & Khuja, M. S. A. A. (2014). A review of tourism development in Malaysia. *European Journal of Business and Management, 6*(5), 1-9.

- Nair, V., Munikrishnan, U. T., Rajaratnam, S. D., & King, N. (2015). Redefining rural tourism in Malaysia: A conceptual perspective. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 20(3), 314-337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2014.889026>
- Okazaki, E. (2008). A community-based tourism model: Its conception and use. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 16(5), 511-529.
- Park, D. B., Lee, K. W., Choi, H. S., & Yoon, Y. (2012). Factors influencing social capital in rural tourism communities in South Korea. *Tourism Management*, 33(6), 1511-1520. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.02.005>
- Park, D. B., Lee, K. W., Nunkoo, R., & Yoon, Y. (2014). Rural residents' attitudes to tourism and the moderating effects of social capital. *Tourism Geographies: An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment*, 17(1), 112-133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2014.959993>
- Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU). (2014). *Economic Transformation Programme Annual Report 2014*. Prime Minister's Department. <http://etp.pemandu.gov.my>.
- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 21, 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.1>
- Prabhakaran, S., Nair, V., & Ramachandran, S. (2013). Marine waste management indicators in a tourism environment: Exploring possibilities for Semporna district, Sabah. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 5(4), 365-376. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-03-2013-0013>
- Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1), 65-78. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1995.0002>
- Putnam, R. D. (1993). The prosperous community-social capital and public life. *The American Prospect*, 13(4), 35-42.
- Ritchie, J., & Spencer, L. (1994). Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In A. Bryman, & R. G. Burges (Eds.), *Analyzing qualitative data* (pp. 173-194). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203413081_chapter_9
- Rohe, W. M. (2004). Building social capital through community development. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 70(2), 158-164.
- Sebastian, L. M., & Rajagopalan, P. (2009). Socio-cultural transformations through tourism: A comparison of residents' perspectives at two destinations in Kerala, India. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 7(1), 5-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766820902812037>
- Semporna District Office. (2015). *Tourism products in Semporna*. Sabah government. Retrieved June 9, 2015, from ww2.sabah.gov.my.
- Sekaran, U. (1992). *Research methods for business: A skill-building approach*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- StudyMalaysia.com. (2015, July 11). Malaysia tourism promotion board (Tourism Malaysia). *StudyMalaysia*. <https://www.studymalaysia.com/education/other-government-agencies/malaysia-tourism-promotion-board-tourism-malaysia>
- Timothy, D. (1999). Participatory planning: A view of tourism in Indonesia. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(2), 371-391. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(98\)00104-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(98)00104-2)
- Tosun, C. (2000). Limits to community participation in the tourism development process in developing countries. *Tourism Management*, 21(6), 613-633. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(00\)00009-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(00)00009-1)
- Woolcock, M., & Narayan, D. (2000). Social capital: Implications for development theory, research, and policy. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 15(2), 225-249. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/15.2.225>

- Woyesa, T., & Kumar, S. (2020). Potential of coffee tourism for rural development in Ethiopia: A sustainable livelihood approach. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 23, 815-832. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-020-00610-7>.
- Zhao, W., Ritchie, J. R. B., & Echtner, C. M. (2011). Social capital and tourism entrepreneurship. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(4), 1570-1593. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2011.02.006>