

# READINESS OF ORANG ASLI COMMUNITIES IN ROYAL BELUM-TEMENGOR FOREST COMPLEX, PERAK TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE ECO-CULTURE TOURISM (ECT) PROGRAMME

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## ABSTRACT

*The study develops a new instrument in measuring the validity of the questionnaire in technology banking applications using the Rasch model as an alternative method. Usually, classical method, the Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ), is used to prove the validity of the instrument. In addition, the Rasch measurement model is also capable of providing guidance to proof quality items to strengthen the legitimacy of the survey instrument. Questionnaire consisting of 28 items and using a 5-level Likert scale with very unimportant to very important as the form of semantic differential was distributed to 223 respondents. Bond and Fox software analysis showed different response patterns to construct items that were measured in the same logit. Findings show the more widespread application of Rasch models would lead to a stronger justification of measurement particularly in cross-cultural studies and whenever measures of individual respondents are of interest.*

**KEYWORDS:** *sustainable eco-cultural tourism, Royal Belum-Temengor, Orang Asli, forest complex, biodiversity*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Eco-culture tourism (ECT) has brought a multitude of definitions for individuals from varied backgrounds. In author's opinion, ECT brings the meaning of an individual or a certain human group travel to enjoy the nature's beauty and also the unique cultural diversity of human populating the earth, where the relationship between both elements (nature and the local community's culture) happens symbiotically. A harmonious and supportive relationship between these aforementioned two elements indirectly shows the importance of the eco-culture tourism in achieving a sustainable development. Furthermore, the implementation is also potentially viable to contribute to the simultaneous goal achievement of conservation and development of the community. The same prospect has been shared by studies done by Swarbrooke (1999), Tsaur et al. (2006), Sharpley (2007), Twining-Ward (2007), Sebele (2009), Irshad (2010), Bernardo (2011), Kamarudin (2013), Kamarudin et al. (2014) and more who all claimed that eco-tourism is one of the branches of sustainable tourism.

Thus, a survey was carried out involving two Orang Asli settlement located in Royal Belum and Temengor Forest Complex (RBTFC), Perak to identify the community's perception on the potential planning and their readiness for sustainable eco-culture tourism projects. In addition, the survey has also identifies potential challenges for sustainable ECT to be developed by local communities as well as by other tourism stakeholders in future.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Sustainable Eco-Culture Tourism (ECT)**

Natural resources (managed or not), community (local host) and tourism (tourists) are the stakeholders for a certain tourism development (Kamarudin, 2013). Ideally, the success of eco-culture tourism (ECT) activity relies completely on strength and the dynamic relationship between these three stakeholders. However, in relation with tourism and sustainable development, a planner cannot help but to understand a bigger frame and a complex relationship between the three stakeholders, and also to account for the relationship between the three stakeholders of sustainability which is economy, social and environment as mentioned by researchers like Briassoulis (2001), Twinning-Ward & Butler (2002) and Kamarudin (2013) (refer to Figure 1).

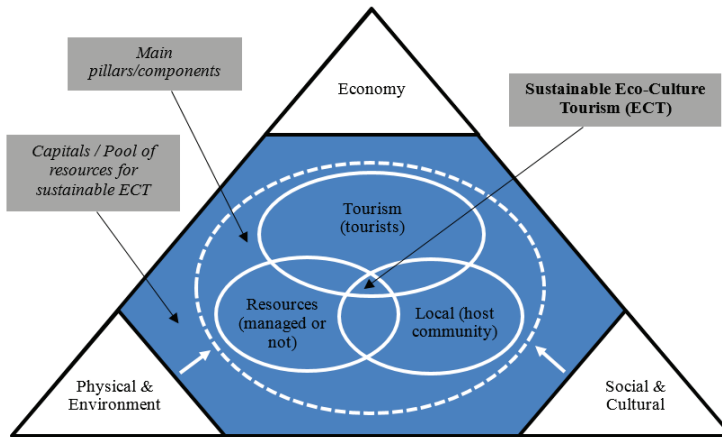


Figure 1: Proposed conceptual model for sustainable eco-culture tourism.

Source: Adopted from Kamarudin and Ngah (2007) and Kamarudin (2007)

Figure 1 shows the proposal of a conceptual framework for the sustainable eco-culture tourism (ECT) development by mentioning the inter-related relationship between the three stakeholders. To realise the theoretical framework, this study suggests that these three stakeholders be strengthened through:

### 1. *Local Community Active Participation*

An indicator to identify the suitability of a certain tourist activity is based on the host community behaviour (Lepp, 2007). This is due to the fact that a community's positive attitude is estimated to effectively encourage community and local stakeholders. According to Carter (1994), Sebele (2009) and Benardo (2011), community participation usually excels in management, when it is done on a small scale and involves participation of the local population, based on these assumptions:

- i. **Cost effective:** There must be a significant consideration for the basic infrastructure such as water, electrical supply, telecommunication and roads which are important aspects to be considered. This is due to the rising cost, in return would influence operational costs, payment rates and operators' overall income. Thus, using a small development scale, the costs are lower compared to a bigger-scaled conventional tourism activities development.
- ii. **Avoiding the debt burden:** A small scale development can help to prevent involved population to carry a debt (especially

debts involving the loans for a certain tourism project). It is also acts as a safer and practical way for local operators, as the investments is small and the debt risk is lower compared to bigger-scaled investments which naturally need a huge amount of money or initial investment.

- iii. Helping the marketing of local products and talents: As the ownership and operation are by the local population, a collective joint venture can be formed where local products and talents such as crafts and porter service/tourist guide can be “sold” and in return would avoid a reliance on outside product and workforce.
- iv. Controlling the profit flow and distribution: The profit generated through tourism activities would be directly channelled to the local development, without being ‘stolen’ and redistributed to non-relating third parties or outside areas.

## **2. *Sensitivity towards Resource Management – Environment and Cultural***

The use of phrase ‘eco-culture’ itself means that the social (cultural) and ecological aspects have to be identified, planned and sustainably managed for a certain tourist activity. A tourism development which only focuses on its economic agenda (which is to increase the number of tourists), without any control or maintenance will destroy the natural resources and quality as well as potentially to undermine a host community’s unique cultural values (Wall and Matheison, 2006; Twining-Ward, 2007; Manyara and Jones, 2007). Thus, a set of maximum limit must be studied and enforced in order to ensure ongoing tourism activities and accepted by the tourists; at the same time ensuring the environment’s quality and its resources will not be facing destruction due to over exploitation (Weaver, 2006; Graci and Dodds, 2010). Small scale of eco - cultural tourism activities offers a limited space; perfect for a limited number of tourists and the facilities’ preparations are only done to cater for a small group. On the other hand, an overly large planning is seen as more to change the natural environment into something more modern to the point of the place losing its own natural resources and unique cultural heritage (Stone and Stone, 2011; Kamarudin, 2013).

## **3. *Tourists’ Role and Behaviour***

The number of tourists is an important indicator to measure the achievement as well as competitiveness of an eco-cultural tourism

industry (Twining-Ward, 2007; Kamarudin, 2013). A hit point of tourists number could mean that the operators involved has benefited from a high income return, thus has ensured the longevity of their business. However, one could easily miss looked the long term risks on nature as well as the community's cultural values (Matarrita-Casante et al., 2010; Stone and Stone, 2011). There have been related cases of a few tourists who feel that the maintenance of the tourists' environment and amenities are the responsibilities of the operators, since the tourists have 'paid for the services' and thus gives them the right to enjoy their holidays as to their pleasure (Logar, 2009). These mentalities should be corrected through education and increase the consciousness to develop respect towards the hosts' culture and society culture; in addition to increase the awareness and sensitivity to the need for keeping the nature intact at the tourists' locations.

## 2.2 Getting the Communities Ready for Sustainable ECT

Community readiness and acceptance for tourism are critical if sustainable ECT program to be taken place in a destination. Previous study on sustainable ECT conducted by Kamarudin et al. (2014) and Kamarudin (2013) has proposed six major stages for getting the community ready for sustainable ECT or known as strategic ECT development process (SECT-DP) (Figure 2).

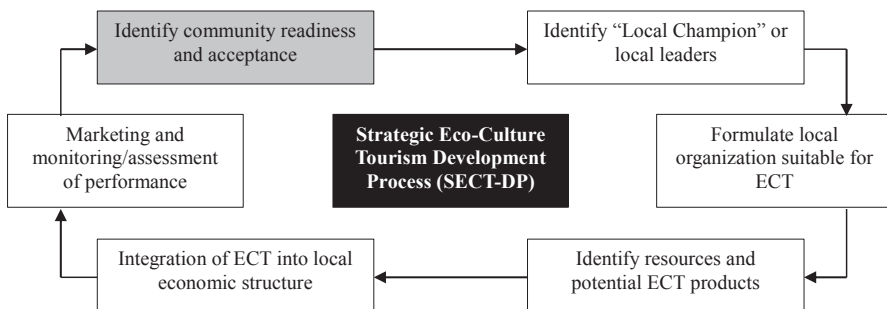


Figure 2: Six crucial stages of Strategic Eco-Culture Tourism Development Process (SECT-DP).

Source: Author (2015); adopted from Kamarudin et al. (2014) and TPRG (2010).

The proposed SECT-DP model was developed based on inputs from review of literature and feedbacks from field study involving several rural communities which have operates community based tourism businesses in Malaysia. The proposed SECT-DP model could potentially be considered as useful guidelines for initiating tourism development at local community level and preparing the community

and their stakeholders once the program expanding and become more complex and more demanding in future (Kamarudin et al., 2014). As can be seen from the proposed model of SECT-DP in Figure 2, the first crucial stage is to identify community (and their stakeholders) readiness and acceptance towards sustainable ECT planning and development. Readiness and acceptance of local community and their stakeholders is essential as it could form the basis for a strong and continuous support, and potentially to reduce internal resistance towards sustainable ECT.

Furthermore, local community within a destination area is often be viewed as the “owner of culture and natural resources” crucial for ECT. The community is also directly responsible for providing and delivering services to tourists and maintaining facilities and tourism products and resources. In this light, the commitment and support of the local community and their stakeholders is important to uphold the overall ECT objective and therefore, the element of community readiness and acceptance need to be initiated at the early stage of SECT-DP.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

#### 3.1 Survey of Two Communities

The study was conducted using triangulation method consisting of observation, questionnaire and interview. The study has selected two Orang Asli settlements as case study subjects: Kampung Semelor of Temenggor forest complex and Kampung Sungai Tiang of Royal Belum state park (refer to Figure 2 for the locations of these villages). There was a lack of information about these two villages, mainly due to the lack of records, written document, and publications to date on the communities and their settlements. However, some information was gathered during interviews with the chief of villages and the visit to JAKOA Gerik office (Research Fieldwork, 2014). Table 1 lists the profile of the two villages.

Table 1: Profile of Kampung Semelor and Kampung Sungai Tiang.  
 Source: (JAKOA Gerik, 2014; Census Book for Kampung Semelor, 2014; Research Fieldwork, 2014)

Village (or <i>Kampung</i> )	Population			Number of families
	Male	Female	Total	
Semelor	85	74	159	30
Sungai Tiang	191	218	409	83

Village (or <i>Kampung</i> )	Sub Ethnic		Religion				TOTAL
	Jahai	Temiar	Islam	Christian	Bahai	Animisme	
Semelor	-	159	80	-	-	79	159
Sungai Tiang	409	-	49	47	43	-	409

Primary data and information for this study were gathered using both quantitative (via questionnaire-guided surveys) and qualitative approaches (via unstructured interviews and field observations). Meanwhile, secondary data and information were gathered from reviews of village census books and unpublished census records from JAKOA Gerik. All of the information was gathered during the site visit in June 2014.

Thirteen respondents (n=13) have agreed to participate in the questionnaire-guided surveys i.e. three respondents from Kampung Semelor and ten respondents from Kampung Sungai Tiang. Two different approaches were adopted when conducting the survey on the local communities, and decisions were made based on different scenarios faced during the visit to each village. For Kampung Semelor, researchers held a meeting with the respondents in the village community hall (Balai Sewang). As for Kampung Sungai Tiang, researchers have to conduct 'door-to-door' interview sessions as it was impossible to meet respondents collectively during the time allocated for the field survey. The questionnaire-guided interviews were carried out by two experienced research assistants.

It is worth to highlight that the number of respondents present for the survey was very low and far from the initial target of 55 respondents (as suggested by a formula for a valid sample size). This low respondent rate could be contributed by the following two factors:

1. Lack of interest from the local people (and also due to timidity) to participate because they were clueless about the purpose of this study, and
2. Insufficient time allocated for the site visit and survey on the local community. The visit was very short (one day to cover each village), hence the researchers were unable to capture necessary tangible and intangible inputs from the communities. According to many ethnography studies, a longer stay is required for each case study to build a rapport with the community and potential respondents (Kamarudin and Ngah, 2007).

#### **4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

As mentioned in an earlier section, the success of sustainable ECT is very much dependent on "buy-in" and continuous support from local community and their stakeholders. In this light, a preliminary study is

being carried out to obtain information related to community's attitude towards ECT, and expectations from ECT especially within the context of Belum-Temengor Forest Complex. The following sections will discuss further some of the study findings.

#### 4.1 Respondents' Perception on Sustainable ECT Program

The results revealed that the majority of respondents (92%) see ECT as a potential industry to be focused by the local community for achieving a balance between local community development while maintaining conservation of surrounding natural and cultural resources. In comparison, only 8% of respondents mentioned "not sure" about the ECT due to lack of knowledge about ECT and its form, but did not totally reject the idea of planning the ECT for their community (Research fieldwork in 2014).

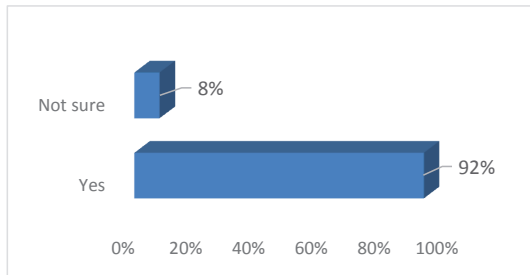


Figure 3: Respondents' perceptions on eco-culture tourism prospect (n=13).

Source: Research fieldwork (2014).

Prior to the result as presented in Figure 3, a detailed analysis has been conducted to identify the underlying reasons for positive feedbacks and "buy-in" from the community. As a result, majority of respondents (84%) consider their village to have what is needed for tourism, in order to be developed including abundant of natural resources and unique culture, which might be further identified and developed as a potential ECT products and attractions (Research fieldwork in 2014). Another 16% consider the potential of their settlements to be tapped into existing tourism businesses that taken place in RBTFC especially by local tour boat operated in Pulau Banding jetty. In this light, the respondents' view the future ECT in Orang Asli villages could be integrated into the existing tourism businesses hence connecting the currently considered as "a missing link" between local tourism players, i.e. local tour boat operators and local host (Orang Asli).



The comparative analysis between villages also showing the same support pattern with all the respondents in Kampung Semelor that agreed with the idea of sustainable ECT (Figure 4). Similarly, 90% of respondents from Kampung Sg. Tiang also sharing the same perception. Only one respondent (10%) from Kampung Sg. Tiang stated “not sure” in answering the questionnaire as in his view, the local youth are currently did not receive suitable training to prepare them for future tourism projects (Research fieldwork in 2014). This feedback has given useful input which the relevant authorities and local communities to be considered in realising their goals for developing sustainable ECT in RBTFC in future.

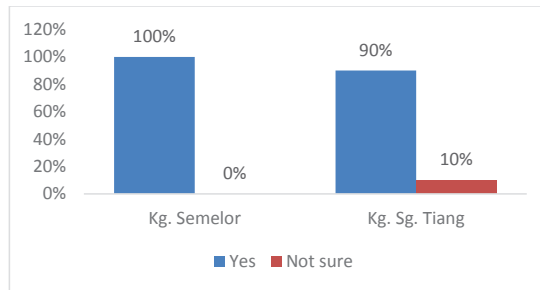


Figure 4: Respondents' perception on prospect of ECT (by villages) (n=13).

Source: Research fieldwork (2014).

Detailed analysis which derived from interviews with local community leaders of both villages indicated the main interest for sustainable ECT laid on its economic and social prospects (Research fieldwork in 2014). These include income generation potential and new jobs creation in tourism and tourism-related sectors (69%), followed by the prospect for promoting local traditional culture and local 'forest-water-based' activities for tourism (21%) and prospect for wider engagement in training programs (10%).

#### 4.2 Issues and Challenges for Sustainable ECT

This section discusses in brief, some potential issues and challenges in sustainable ECT programs using information from interviews with local community leaders and field observations. These issues and challenges should be highlighted and explained since they might affect or influence the outcomes of the sustainable ECT planning, development and management processes in future. The issues and challenges are discussed from the SECT-DP perspectives. Since this study is in its early stage, the discussions are limit to the three early stages namely (1) identifying community readiness and acceptance towards ECT; (2)

Identification of local leaders (local champions) and (3) Identify local organizational suitability for ECT. The previous section however, has discussed stage (1) hence leaving issues/challenges as identified during stage 2 and 3 to be highlighted and discussed in this section (Figure 5).

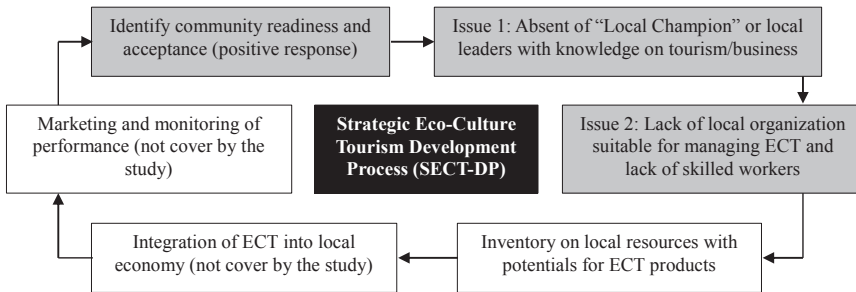


Figure 5: Issues/challenges identified in response to SECT-DP model.  
Source: Research fieldwork (2014).

1. *Absent of "Local Champion" or local leaders with knowledge on tourism/business*

The long-term viability of sustainable ECT projects depend on “buy in” and continuous support from the local community thus, the presence of a strong leader is required to inspire and give a clear direction regarding the monitoring process. Based on the data collected during the fieldwork in 2014, the local leader of Kampung Semelor (Batin Samad) is seen to be a dedicated person who have initiated various local economic projects for the community including small-scale rubber plantation projects, Kelulut beehives project and sewing and craft workshops for women (Research fieldwork in 2014). Under his leadership, Kampung Semelor has won a number of recognitions, including Anugerah Desa Lestari (Sustainable Village Award – Orang Asli settlement category) for year 2013 (Research fieldwork in 2014). In the case of Kampung Sungai Tiang, there is some issues regarding their local leader (Batin) since the Batin has moved out from his village to reside at a nearby island with his family (Research fieldwork in 2014). The absence of Batin as a leader to his people, has raised concern among the community about their future and welfare. In conclusion, both identified leaders are people of different situations and style of leadership. In relation to sustainable ECT in particular, and leaders for managing tourism businesses in general however, require the current local leader to be equipped with knowledge and suitable skills and experience (entrepreneur mind set) to managing tourism businesses and to realise the long term goals of developing local economy through conservation of biodiversity and natural/cultural resources.

2. *Lack of local organization suitable for managing ECT and lack of skilled workers*

Based on field observation carried out by authors in 2014, the current local organisation in the two villages under studies also did not have a specific local organisation/committee that is in charge of planning/preparation for managing tourism businesses (Research fieldwork in 2014). Having said that, the local organizations which have been observed are structurally unclear, with no specific tasks delegation and did not formally include every section of the community, especially youth and women's groups (Research fieldwork in 2014). Based on feedbacks from local respondents, there could be a strong support by community members to take part into the establishment of local ECT organisation in future – if the community could pool talented and dedicated individuals from within the community, with active participation by every section of the community including women and young people, and working closely with other partners as mentioned in Figure 1.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

In a post-modern world where our societies are becoming more concern with our way in dealing with development and exploitation of resources to fulfil our endless needs, finding a way to balance between development action and conservation interest are very much needed. It is highly recognized by various researchers and international bodies that a properly planned and managed tourism project can actually contribute towards achievement of sustainable development of local communities and their stakeholders. This is where the idea to propose eco-culture tourism projects for sustainable development and conservation of RBT areas is coming into discussion. In light, this paper discussed the conceptual model of sustainable ECT and SECT-DP and the extent to which these models could be harmoniously inserted into the conservation paradigm of RBT in general and for sustainable development of Orang Asli in particular. Thus, the indigenous area could preserve the beauty and biodiversity of the forest while diversify their source of income (continuous and stable income generation and maintaining jobs without have to migrate or finding jobs outside the area).

Results of survey from local stakeholder in two selected villages regarding their perceptions on ECT program are also presented in this paper. The needs and opinions from communities are important aspects in this study in order to respect them as the owner of the land,

as well as an acknowledgement for the community with long relations with the areas, hence to avoid future difficulties or misunderstandings when the communities are about to carry out the idea of rural tourism. As expected, the communities have viewed the idea of ECT positively, however, information from field observation acknowledged some challenges for ECT, which could be explored further through a more comprehensive studies. It is proposed that all stakeholders such as government, non-governmental agencies and tourism sectors vitally, should continue their strong support and continuous commitment towards implementation of sustainable ECT projects for development of local communities and conservation of pristine forest and its natural resources in RBT.

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