

Impacts of Tourism Development in Langkawi Island, Malaysia: a Qualitative Approach

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Abstract:-

Nowadays, tourism is always regarded as an important means to benefit local communities. The success of the developed countries in expanding tourism industry has inspired many developing countries including Malaysia to give a due recognition to the industry as the main driver in the nation's economic development. Based on a case study conducted in Langkawi Island, this article attempts to track the progress of tourism development of the island since 1986 until year 2004. The Government and private sector had invested a lot of money in providing public infrastructure and facilities to boost the tourism industry in the island. Despite the massive amount of money spent on tourism development, no study had been conducted to relate tourism spending with the impact of these developments towards the local economy and socio-culture. The case study was conducted from March to July 2004. The main focus of the study is to explore and identify economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts of tourism development in Langkawi Island. Forty semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders involving hotel managers, government and non-government organizations representatives, resort and tourism developers and community leaders were conducted and analysed using Ritchie and Spencer's 'framework method'. Two key issues were identified and discussed further. Those are: (1) the benefits of tourism development; (2) the costs of tourism development. The analysis also found that despite the limitation and development issues, the benefits of tourism development in Langkawi far outweighed the costs accrued to the local populace.

Keywords: *Langkawi Islands, tourism development, economic opportunity, benefit, cost.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been recognised as a key economic stimulant in most developed countries since the middle of the twentieth century. However, developing countries only began to identify the

potential of the tourism industry for their national

economies only in the 1970s (Alipour, 1996; Sirat, 1993). By 1980s, the tourism industry had grown dramatically in many third world countries (Lea, 1988) but, governments in developing countries only started formulating plans and investment policies for tourism planning and development by 1990s (Hall, 1995). Prior to that, they were indirectly involved in this industry without any formal structures for tourism planning and development (Lea, 1988).

Even without proper planning, citizens in developing countries still gain the benefit of tourism development, but mostly through 'blue collar' employment or petty trading businesses (Tosun and Jenkins, 1996). Most of the profitable businesses were only enjoyed by foreign investors or local elites (Bird, 1989; France, 1998). Simultaneously, destination areas also changed rapidly with unplanned and uncontrolled tourism development, and ultimately led to environmental degradation (Green *et al.*, 1990) and socio-economic imbalance in tourism destination areas (Coomansingh, 2004; de Kadt, 1979; Jafari, 1974; Edelman, 1975; Sadler, 1975). Many scholars (D'Amore, 1983; Jenkins, 1982; Linton, 1987) pointed out that this problem is caused by the lack of a participation approach in tourism planning and the highly centralised planning system, including with improper public administration (Akama, 2002; Timothy, 1999; Tosun, 1998). For example, Tosun and Jenkins (1996) found that tourism progress in Turkey is threatened by an authoritative public administration system brought about by a centralised administration system, creating differences among the local and central authorities. Several master plans prepared had failed to be realised and many popular destinations had started to lose their unique quality due to over-commercialisations.

Therefore, this paper is attempting to identify the nature of tourism planning and development in the Langkawi Islands, Malaysia. It is also investigated the benefits and costs brought by tourism development to the islands.

Tourism development in Langkawi

Before 1987, 67% of the employment in the Langkawi Islands was in the agriculture and

fisheries sectors. About 40% of agriculture land was occupied by with rubber plantations, 30% was paddy field, another 20% was mixed crops and the remaining land was coconut plantations (Langkawi District Office, 1992). However, although the principal economic activity of the local population was agriculture, yields were low, especially those of paddy cultivation, because of the small size of cultivation area. Low yields were also caused by inadequate irrigation facilities and the use of traditional methods of farming, and the fact that small-scale agriculture was usually not for commercial farming.

However, the declaration of a duty free island in 1987 not only advanced the development of the tourism industry, but also tremendously changed the socio-economic patterns in Langkawi. By the middle of the 1990s, the service sector became the main contributor to the island's economy (Langkawi Municipal Council, 2002). About 32.3% of the working population were involved in the wholesaling and retailing sector, 21% in social services and only 17.3% were employed in the agriculture and fisheries sector (Langkawi Municipal Council, 2002).

Compared to before 1987, when the majority of the working population (79%) received only RM 500 or less a month (Langkawi District Office, 1992), employment opportunities in tourism industry have provided an increase in monthly income. As Langkawi's economy grew steadily, 68.1% of the working populations received a monthly income between MYR\$ 501 to MYR\$ 2000, 4.1% received more than RM 2001, and another 27.8% received less than MYR\$ 500 a month (LADA, 1999). Table 1 explains further the chronology of tourism development in the Langkawi Islands.

Table 1 Chronology of tourism development in the Langkawi Islands

Year	Progress of tourism in Langkawi
1975	Malaysia Tourism Development Plan was produced. Langkawi Islands has been mentioned as one of the potential tourism destination in Northern Region. Despite of the proposal, no action was taken to tourism development in Langkawi.
1977	Tourism mater plan was prepared for Langkawi Islands by Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Company (1976) focusing on resort and hotel development in Tanjung Rhu, Chenang Beach and Kuah. However, the plan was never been implemented.
1983	Money was allocated for developing tourism under mid term review of 4 th

	Malaysian Plan 1981-1985.
1984	Promet Berhad with supported from the government launched the proposal to develop 1,000 acres in Tanjung Rhu, Langkawi as an international tourism spot. Three years after that, the project was down scale, the company was take over by TRI Berhad. Tanjung Rhu becomes devastated area.
1986	The Federal Government announced to develop Langkawi as tourism destination.
1987	Langkawi Islands was declared by the Federal Government as a Duty Free island from 1 st January 1987.
1988	The Langkawi International Airport was opened.
1990	Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) was incorporated by an Act of Parliament on 1 st January 1990.
1991	Another MYR\$ 350 million had been allocated under the 6 th Malaysian Plan (1991-1995) to improve local residents' socio-economic and further development in tourism infrastructure in Langkawi.
1992	The Langkawi Structure Plan was produced for a long term development policy until 2005.
2001	Langkawi was declared as first 'Tourism City' in Malaysia on the 24 th March 2001 by the State Government of Kedah.
2003	Langkawi Tourism Action Council was created by Tourism Ministry and was under LADA administration.
2005	Langkawi Local Plan was produced stressing on future development on tourism development in Langkawi until 2015.

Source: Langley (2002); Sharif (2002); Langkawi Municipal Council (2005)

The growth of the tourism industry has also changed the migration pattern of the young and educated youth from Langkawi within the age group of 15 to 30 years. Previously, until 1986, about 27.4% of these young people migrated to Pahang in the mainland to participate in the Federal Government land development program and other government resettlement schemes. Another 22.2% went to Penang to work in the industrial sector, 17.9% moved to Kuala Lumpur, and about 16.4% shifted to Selangor (Langkawi District Office, 1992). Moreover, at that time, many low skill job

opportunities were available in these states, especially those of factory workers. With the success of the tourism industry and with evidence of increasing job opportunities, many people were being lured back to Langkawi. In fact, rapid development in Langkawi has triggered migration from the Malaysian mainland because of attractive and diversified employment opportunities (State Economic Planning Unit, 2001). Additionally, indicative of the trend of tourism development, the unemployment rate in the Langkawi Islands decreased from 9.7% in 1980, to 9.2% in 1990, and 8.7% in 2000 (Langkawi Municipal Council, 2002).

In addition, impacts from the urbanisation process and industrial activities have placed pressure on natural resources and environmental quality. Because of the rapid pace of development, many developments were not properly carried out (Bird, 1989) and have damaged the sustainability and aesthetic appeal of the islands (Langley, 2002). Coastal environments, particularly those with sandy shorelines such as the Langkawi coastal zone, are always exposed to negative physical impacts (Wong, 1991).

As indicated in the Langkawi Structure Plan (Langkawi District Office, 1992), several types of development along the coastal areas have had a negative impact on the natural environment such as coastal erosion and sedimentation. These include commercial development in Kuah, chalet developments at Chenang Beach and the development project at Tanjung Rhu. In addition, a lot of land reclamation in coastal areas for commercial and infrastructure development has changed the landscape of the islands, some projects were successfully developed (Picture 1) but, some of them became a swamp area after the projects were abandoned (Picture 2).

The Langkawi Structure Plan (1990-2005) also identified some weaknesses and effects from tourism development to the natural environment as follows:

- No special areas were reserved for nature lovers and the public to study or enjoy the wildlife, such as birds.
- Disturbance to the natural environment in Langkawi has affected the stability of the island ecosystem.
- Several types of development along the coast in coastal areas have had a negative impact on the natural environment, including coastal erosion and sedimentation

Picture 1: Reclamation project for recreation and attraction point at Kuah Town was well developed and become a tourist attraction



Picture 2: Reclamation project for hotel and resort development near Chenang Beach was abandoned after the economic recession in 1997 and 1998



A study by Morshidi (1993) also identifies many developments in Langkawi which did not involve local entrepreneurs because for the requirement of high capital expenditure. The benefits from tourism seem to be exploited by people from the mainland rather than the local community. Moreover, the lack of education has made local people on Langkawi only capable of obtaining employment as 'blue collar' workers, while 'white collar' employment is mostly grabbed by other 'local workers' coming from the mainland.

Sharif (2000) state that, tourism development in Langkawi is perceived to have had a positive impact in social and environment aspects. They found that local residents accepted the development in Langkawi positively. Perhaps an improvement in basic infrastructure and public facilities were indirectly benefited the residents and influenced their perceptions of tourism development (Sharif, 2000). Kayat (2002) defines that in Langkawi, residents' perceptions of tourism were strongly influenced by the benefits and costs of development and their attitudes towards tourism. Those who received a benefit from tourism stated they personally were dependent on tourism or that Langkawi was dependant on tourism, while those who did not receive anything did not indicate dependency on tourism. The preceding discussion showed that the residents of Langkawi had

different views on tourism industries. Despite their positive views on tourism, and intention to adapt to the changes, the residents wanted to develop their communities as usual and make tourism work for them, rather than hurt them (Kayat, 2002).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Stakeholder interviews were used to identify the perceptions and opinions of stakeholders on the effects of tourism development on the study area from the environmental, economic, and social perspectives. According to Richardson and Fluker (2004: 383), tourism stakeholders are *'those who have an interest in, or who are affected by tourism. They include travel and tourism companies, governments, and host communities'*. A review on other tourism literatures (Din, 1993; Timothy, 1999; Tosun, 1998; and Yuksel *et al.*, 1998) suggested that stakeholders could be classified into four different groups: (1) government officials; (2) private company officials or entrepreneurs; (3) local community; and (4) interested groups such as non-government organisations (NGOs).

However, to confirm this suggestion from the literature, further information was obtained from local sources in the study area, including through meetings with two government agencies: the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) and the State of Kedah Economic Planning Unit (SEPU) in January 2003. This was followed in 2004 by personal correspondence through email with a town planner from the Department of Town and Country Planning.

Qualitative sampling is drawn from information factors rather than the number of participants (Kayat, 2002; Brunt & Courtney, 1999). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested two elements involved in qualitative sampling: (1) setting the boundaries to define aspects of the subject under investigation within the limit of time and resources, and (2) creating a frame to discover, confirm, and qualify the basic construct on the study foundation. Therefore, a purposive sampling was used for this study, where the research questions and study's aims were used to set the boundaries for sampling decisions. In addition, advice from the State of Kedah Economic Planning Unit was also sought prior to selecting the respondents.

The respondents were selected based on their expertise, roles, and involvement in tourism development in the study area, and were categorised into four stakeholder groups: (1) government departments, (2) private companies, (3) community leaders, and (4) non-government organisations. As Brunt and Courtney (1999) suggested, grouping the stakeholders is important to avoid a homogeneous group of representatives. In total, 40 respondents were selected to be involved in this study. 14 of those respondents

represented government agencies, 16 were from private companies, 5 were from non government organisations, while the other 5 respondents were community leaders.

The interviews were recorded by tapes and notes, and lasted between 45 minutes to 75 minutes. An appointment was made with each respondent two weeks before the actual interview. Most of the interviews were held at the interviewee's office, although some of them preferred to be interviewed in their homes. The interviewees were free to decide whether to do the interviews in English or Malay, although most of them preferred to talk in Malay. The analysis process for interview data was done using a framework technique developed for applied policy research by Ritchie and Spencer (1994). A framework technique involves a systematic process with five stages of data analysis: familiarisation, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, and mapping and interpretation.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The discussion of the study's findings is divided into two subsections discussing on the benefits and costs of tourism development to the Langkawi Islands.

The benefits of tourism development

Four themes in regard to the benefits of tourism development in Langkawi were identified in the analysis of interview data, and are explained further in this section.

Improving quality of life: The development of the tourism industry in the Langkawi Islands focuses on economic development and prosperity, as explained in the Langkawi Development Authority objective (LADA, 1999: 18):

"The key objective of LADA is to make Langkawi a major tourism destination and to upgrade the socio-economic standards of the local people as stipulated in the Draft of the Langkawi Structure Plan 1990-2005."

Besides, there is no doubt about the improvement brought by tourism development to the Langkawi Islands. All forty interviewees agreed that tourism development in Langkawi had tremendously improved the quality of life of local residents. An officer from a state government agency (Respondent 4) remarked:

"...the good things are...tourism has improved the quality of life of local residents by providing them with better jobs, business opportunities and other

benefits.”

Another respondent (Respondent 33), a community leader, thought tourism development significantly brought, “...a lot of positive impacts especially regarding the quality of life among local residents.” He thought local residents’ living standards had increased with employment in the hotel and services industry, which provided them with a good income.

Business opportunities: Similar to a previous study in Langkawi by Kayat (2002), this study found the tourism industry had provided opportunities for local residents to be involved in entrepreneurial opportunities. A community leader (Respondent 33) explained the type of businesses run by local residents, “some of them are involved in tourism activities as entrepreneurs in budget hotels, retail shops and as taxi owners.” In addition, another community leader (Respondent 35) explained the reason why local residents prefer to work in the tourism business:

“...the tourism industry is more profitable compared to agriculture. It offers a lot of opportunities and doesn’t have as much risk as agriculture.”

The interview findings also revealed that the government was the driving force behind all economic activity in Langkawi. Government agencies such as MARA (People’s Trust Council) were actively helping local entrepreneurs in their businesses through financial assistance. A chalet entrepreneur (Respondent 20) who was among the recipients of financial assistance related:

“I started this business in 1990 with just three rooms and now I have 17 rooms. At that time I received financial support from MARA to start my business.”

Besides, the Langkawi Development Authority was also involved, as one of its officers (Respondent 4) remarked:

“...the Langkawi Development Authority Act states that local people should get priority in job and business opportunities, and we follow the Act by giving our support in these ways.”

In addition, some of the private companies were also actively assisted local residents to develop a small business. A hotel executive (Respondent 16) explained:

“...about our cooperation with the local community...we want to give them some business opportunities by bringing our guests to the local village to experience local culture.”

Employment opportunities: All stakeholders in this study agreed that tourism development is positive in generating employment opportunities for local residents in the Langkawi Islands. A community leader (Respondent 32) explained:

“before this, most of them (local residents) were involved in agriculture and fisheries, but now, tourism has become the main economic activities...almost everybody has a friend or relative working with an international hotel or a local chalet...or with a tourism related businesses such as a tour guide, travel agent or souvenir shop. Local people also work as taxi drivers, businessmen and government servants.”

Previously, Kayat (2002) found that employment opportunities in Langkawi had more benefit to the younger generation. A community leader (Respondent 31) confirmed that progress, as he remarked:

“...the unemployment rate has decreased and you know 77% of Langkawi residents have an income rate between RM500-RM1000.00 (AUD \$ 200-400) a month and 1.4% received over RM3000.00 (AUD \$ 1200) a month. The average for the whole islands is about RM1341.00 (AUD \$ 550) a month.”

The economic benefits of tourism development are highly welcome by local residents. As an officer from the state government department (Respondent 6) remarked, “...they (local residents) are happy, because nowadays their income is higher than before...”

In fact, the employment opportunities in Langkawi had consequently attracted migration from mainland Malaysia to the islands. The Langkawi Development Authority recorded a combined 54% of new immigrants and Langkawians returning to Langkawi between 1987 and 1999 (LADA, 1999). Nevertheless, there still are many job vacancies, as a hotel manager (Respondent 16) explained:

“We use contract staff from

Indonesia as our workers because it was difficult to get local workers due to competition among hoteliers."

On the other hand, he (Respondent 16) also explained that local residents as have negatively exploited the supply of employment opportunities:

"They are not serious because it is easier for them to get a job...they might work with us for 5 or 6 months and then quit to work with other companies. It is hard for us because sometimes 5 or 6 people quit at the same time and it's always happening."

Similarly, a manager at a duty free complex (Respondent 30) voiced his concern at the attitudes of local workers (the younger generation):

"...most of the younger generation feel very happy about having a temporary job or frequently change their job after three or four months as they are not seriously planning for their future."

Physical development: It is since 1986 until the present day, tourism industry has been the primary cause of development in Langkawi. According to the previous Chief Minister of Kedah (Sanusi Junid), about one billion Malaysian Ringgit (AUD \$ 450 million) was spent by the government in Langkawi from 1986 until 2002 on infrastructure and socio-economic development (LADA, 2002). That figure however, is not included with one billion Malaysian Ringgit (AUD \$ 450 million) spent by private companies in hotels and resort infrastructure (Bahrin & The, 1998). That spending has significantly changed the islands from a small fishing community into a modern tourist destination (LADA, 2002). Similarly, the stakeholders in this study agreed that they had observed the changes to the physical development in the islands. An officer from the state government agency (Respondent 11) asserted:

"I think from my observation, Langkawi was drastically developed since receiving the status of a duty free island in 1987...in fact, the standard of infrastructure here is much better compared to certain areas in the mainland."

A community leader (Respondent 31) voiced his proud of the development in Langkawi as stated

that, *"...the government did most of the development especially on the infrastructure project, and we received a lot of benefit from that project."*

Furthermore, published data shows that during the Seventh Malaysian Plan (1995-2000), the federal government allocated about 464.3 million Malaysian Ringgit (AUD \$ 135 million) for development in Langkawi, where about 46% of that was used to develop and maintain public facilities. Besides the infrastructure project, the government is also cooperated with private companies in developing tourist attractions, such as the Langkawi Cable Car, beach resorts and theme parks.

The costs of tourism development

Four themes regarding to the costs of tourism development in Langkawi were identified during the analysis of the interviews data, which are discussed further in this section.

Social and cultural impact: The interviews found that tourism development also led to social and cultural consequences to the study area. Many stakeholders admitted the problems associated with increasing drug uses alcoholism and HIV cases. All of them considered these problems seriously, since there has been a lot of damage to the community, especially to the younger generations. A managing director (Respondent 23) at a tourism company remarked:

"We also have a lot of social problems, for example we have drug addicts, HIV cases, and alcoholics...the younger generation just think on happiness, when they become beach boys: they may have relationships with foreign visitors, but they never learn from bad experiences."

According to Kayat (2002), the duty free status of Langkawi made alcohol cheaper than other places in Malaysia and, to make the situation worse, it is accessible to everybody because of a lack of regulation. An owner of a local resort (Respondent 22) voiced his concern on the alcoholism issues, *"...because of the duty free, liquor is cheaper than before and everybody can buy it freely."* The fact that the majority of residents were Moslem does not prevent that outcome, as a community leader (Respondent 34) said, *"even though the Moslem is prohibited from drinking liquor, it is so difficult to prevent this problem since the price is cheap."*

Many interviewees were also concerned that the influx of tourists from different cultural and social

backgrounds could negatively affect local community moral values. They observed the younger generation in the islands as being, “*influenced from foreign cultures brought by foreign visitors*” (Respondent 22). In fact, a chalet operator (Respondent 21) stated, “*migration from the mainland has also brought a lot of social problems when the locals followed their bad attitude.*”

In acknowledging the social and cultural impacts from tourism development, some stakeholders viewed the causes of the problem differently. They did not put the blame just on tourism development but also on the changing situations of the residents. As a community leader (Respondent 34) explained, “*...lately, it is too difficult to just blame the tourist (for social problems) because children nowadays have too many options for all the problems.*”

Another interesting view came from an officer from a federal government agency who thought that the geographical factor was also a significant contribution to the problem, as he (Respondent 12) observed, “*most of the younger generation I think have never travelled beyond this island... so their minds are still a bit closed compared to others on the mainland.*” However, another interviewee (Respondent 38), a member from an NGO put the blame on the government as:

“...they should build more facilities such as a sport centre or public swimming pool for their (younger generation) use. What happens is, right now there are no such facilities for the kids to spend their time and that’s why they get involved with bad things.”

Higher living cost: The residents of Langkawi are also facing higher costs of living, as a government officer (Respondent 11) explained:

“I think the cost of living in Langkawi is higher than certain places on the mainland. You will feel that cost even if you come here just as a tourist because the price of certain goods is a bit higher.”

Although this may not become a burden to all residents, the low-income group are the most affected as suggested by Kayat (2002), and supported by interviewee (Respondents 31) comments, “*when the cost of living increases...not every one can afford for that*” but, at least, “*for local residents...they know where to get a better price.*” (Respondent 21)

Expensive property and land value: In Langkawi, after the islands became a duty free island, property and land was highly sought, either by the government or private companies and consequently there was an increase in property prices. In this study, the stakeholders had a mixed perception regarding higher property prices.

A community leader (Respondent 31) viewed the scenario as a benefit to local residents since they could get more money by selling their land, as he said, “*because of tourism development our property value has increased...in fact, local people also know how to evaluate their land right now.*”

However, a town planner (Respondent 4) from a government department viewed the consequences of what had already happened, since “*local land owners always sell their land without having a long term plan...they just want instant money.*” An observation from a restaurant owner (Respondent 25) provided further illustration on the long-term affects of an increase in land price, as he said:

“One of the great mistakes made by local people here is that they sold their land to a big company because of a high price. However, it may have been better for them to keep the land, cooperate with other property owners, and develop as a group. One more thing is what will they have left for the younger generation after another 20 or 30 years?”

Environmental impact: The development of tourism infrastructure and facilities had indirectly affected the natural environment of the Langkawi Islands. A government officer (Respondent 4) from the state department remarked:

“The quality of the natural environment has decreased compared to before, maybe because of too much physical development in Langkawi. Too many developments in the coastal area have significantly changed the islands’ landscape.”

The environmental issue seems to be a sensitive topic to some respondents. When asked what had changed in the quality of the environment in the islands, an officer from a state government agency gave a contrary explanation. She thought tourism development had not harmed the environment. However, a resort owner (Respondent 21) gave his observation on the changes of the natural condition in the beach areas:

“I think after the reclamation for the airport and the wave breaker was built, Chenang Beach has been damaged. Compared to before, I think this beach has lost about 30 feet just because of erosion, especially after the wave break was built.” (Respondent 21)

Some respondents also argued about the development which was done without any Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study. The race for economic profits has indirectly damaged the environment as a federal department officer (Respondent 30) explained on the costs and benefits of infrastructure development:

“A lot of development and reclamation projects was done...currently there is no more mangrove area in the Western coastal area except on the Eastern coastal area. That was a negative impact but, on the positive view, it has created a new area for a marina and another business area.”

There is also a lack of coordination between the governments agencies in terms of infrastructure development, as a local government officer (Respondent 5) explained:

“The problem is with the federal government project because it’s not contained in the local plan (physical plan) and they just go ahead and develop the project without referring to the local plan...”

DISCUSSION

Findings of tourism impacts from the stakeholder interviews are explained from the economic, social and environmental perspectives.

Economic impacts of tourism

According to the stakeholders, tourism development in Langkawi has created positive impacts with more prospects for local residents to be involved in business and opportunities for employment in the hotel industry. However, tourism also has increased negative impacts on the cost of living and the value of property and land. But, the interviews found different views on the issue of land value, some interviewees were happy with the increment as they could make more money by selling their land. However, other interviewees were worried that a higher land price could

negatively become a constraint for future generations to buy land.

Social impacts of tourism

Since more employment and business opportunities were created by tourism, local residents’ quality of life has also increased positively, as well as the quality of infrastructure and facilities. However, in a different scenario, the younger generation seems to have negative impacts from foreign culture in addition to some other issues on social problems, such as alcoholism, drug use and HIV cases.

Environmental impacts of tourism

Many interviewees suggested that tourism development in Langkawi has increased positive impacts on local residents’ awareness on environment conservation. However, rapid development also contributed to negative impacts on environmental degradation. The limitations of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations raised some concerns from the interviewees. Various projects were done without a proper study on EIA. Although some development projects went through EIA processes, it was not involved with the participation process because of the weaknesses in regulations.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the stakeholders’ interviews on the impact of tourism development in the Langkawi Islands identified several issues relating to the development process. All respondents agreed that tourism development had benefited the development of Langkawi Islands and local residents especially. Tourism developments have improved the quality of life of local residents, provided business and employment opportunities. Large scale development by the government and private companies has improved Langkawi’s infrastructure and significantly changed the islands into an international tourist destination. The interviewees suggested that more business opportunities have been created because of the government and private sector investment in tourism infrastructure. This increase in investment has improved the perception of local residents towards the tourism industry. They believed that tourism development has contributed more positive impacts than negative impacts in Langkawi.

The stakeholders are also aware that much of the development has had a detrimental affected on local residents and the natural environment. Despite the economic benefits, local residents have to deal with a higher cost of living and increasing property values. Even though a minority of the residents benefited by selling their land to private companies, some stakeholders were worried about this trend, since many transactions in landownership have decreased the local equity in property ownership. They were worried that if the

phenomenon continued, it would leave the future generations of Langkawi empty-handed.

The majority of the stakeholders also agreed that tourism development in Langkawi brings more benefits than costs to local residents, and significantly changed residents' attitudes towards the tourism industry. Stakeholders from community leaders and business companies seem to agree that residents' attitudes have changed positively, since they have understood the purpose of tourism development. As a local businessperson (Respondent 23) observed:

“...previously they were always suspicious with visitor or any tourism program. Now it is easy to get cooperation from them because they know what they can benefit from tourism. The economical factor has changed their perception....”

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