

Developing Community Capacity through Experiential Learning:

*A Case Study of Kg Sungai
Melayu Ecotourism Village*



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Introduction



Community-based tourism (CBT) is seen as a tool to improve rural people's livelihood and at the same time help in conserving nature.

CBT is a form of tourism that is developed, operated, managed, and ultimately beneficial to the local community (Ibrahim & Razzaq, 2010).

Community capacity building (CCB) is the key to community-based tourism development.

CCB empowers the communities to actively participate in planning, developing, and implementing tourism at the community level. (F. Ahmeti, 2013)

Experiential Learning

Kolb (1984) defined experiential learning theory as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience".

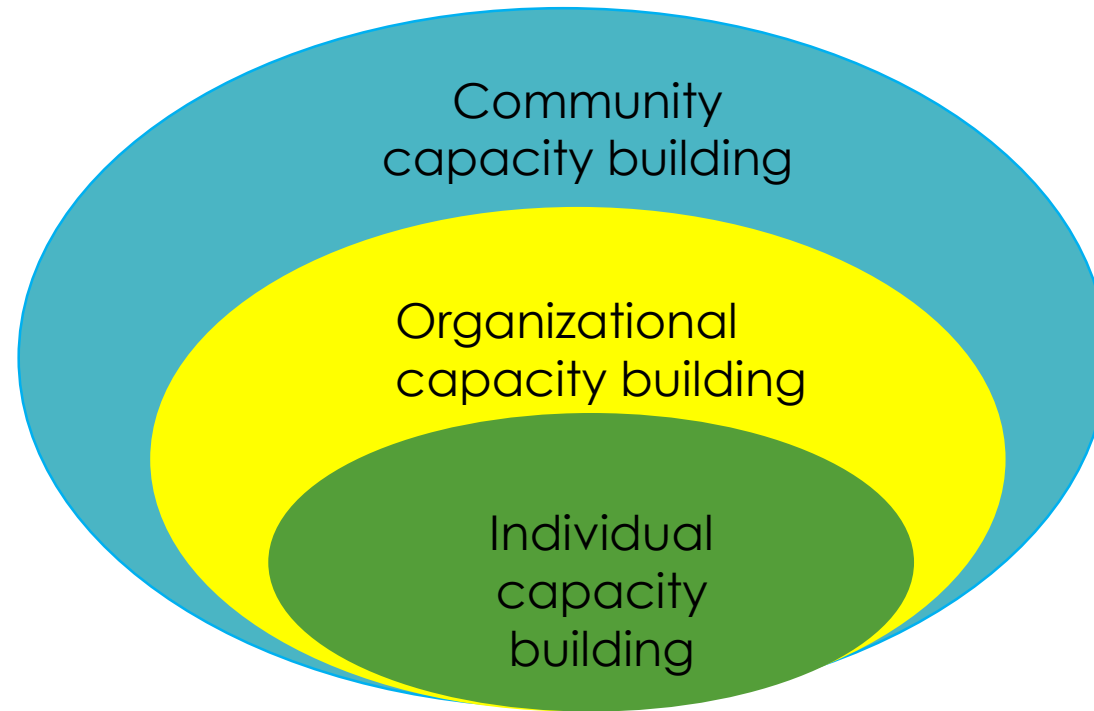
This means that someone learning something new based on their own experience will form a new concept that will be used in a real-life situation.

**I HEAR AND I FORGET.
I SEE AND I REMEMBER.
I DO AND I UNDERSTAND.**

— CONFUCIUS



Levels of Community Capacity Building



Minkler and Wallerstein (2011)

Levels of Community Capacity Building

Individual capacity building

- individual skills and potential skills needed to achieve the desired changes and outcomes.
- strategies should be adopted to complement all the necessary knowledge and skills essential to personal growth, such as participation level, and various individual skills
- This development strategy may include individuals who are part of an organization or community, and individuals who are, or are part of, or can contribute to community development in the future.

Organizational capacity building

- An organization is the one that can determine how individual capabilities are used and strengthened.
- Organizations provide technical expertise and capabilities, allocate all necessary resources (whether financial or physical in nature), engage in awareness management, provide innovative knowledge, and advance human resources.
- Have the ability to lead the community development process because they can contribute to and improve leadership, or by building partnerships with other organizations and communities (JICA, 2004).

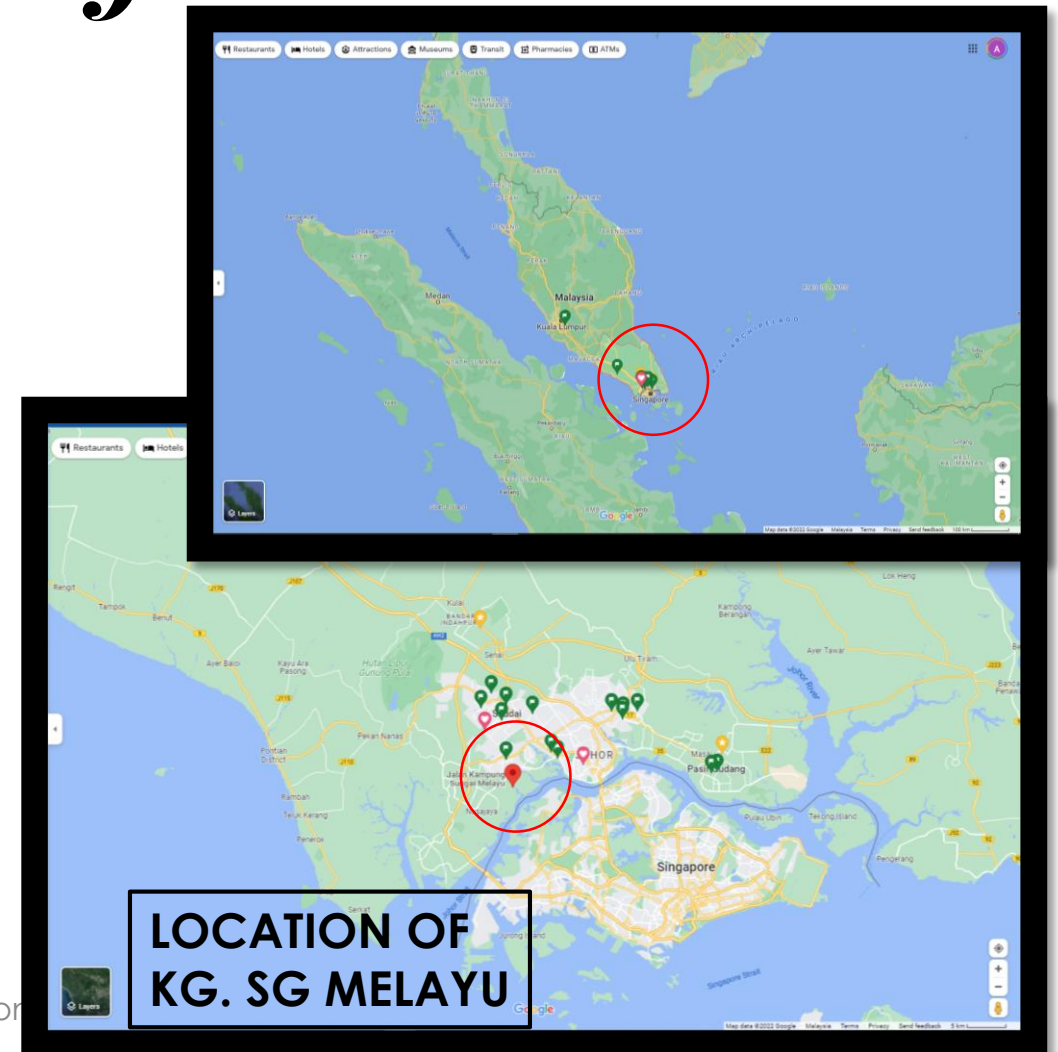
Community capacity building

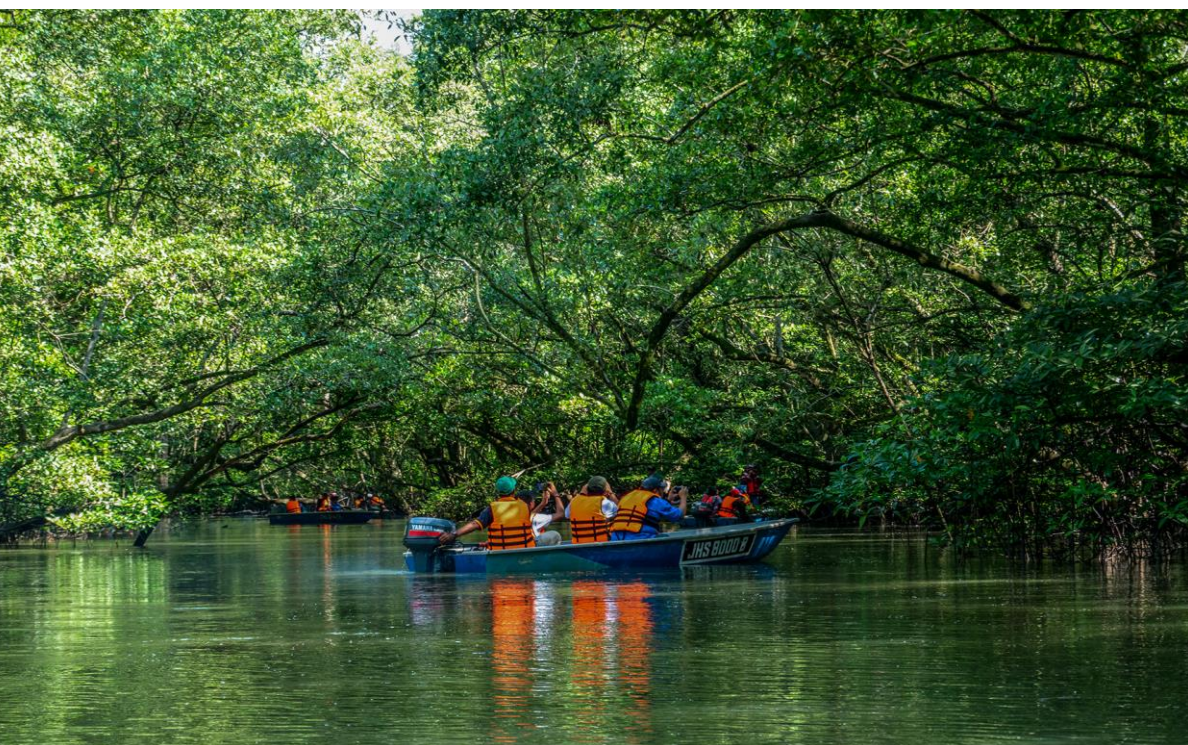
- Individuals and organizations are part of the community.
- Community-level capabilities are broader than individuals or specific organizations and include informal and formal links between individuals and organizations, and between different organizations within the community.
- Moreover, communities are not separate entities. In this regard, to benefit from the experience of the external community, the infrastructure needs to be connected to other network equipment.
- It is associated with the development of social wealth and various forms of networks involving individuals and community members (either alone or through the involvement of organizations), strengthening relationships between community members, which is the community (Woodhouse, 2006).

Minkler and Wallerstein (2011)

Case Study: Kg. Sg. Melayu Eco Tourism Village , Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia

- Located about 20km from the city of Johor Bahru, Kampung Sungai Melayu which is over 150 years old is quite famous among tourists from within and outside the country.
- Located near Kota Iskandar, Nusajaya, the administrative center of the Johor state government, the village, which is surrounded by mangrove swamps and rivers, has its own unique value with a very peaceful village environment.
- In 2013, the village was selected as an ecotourism pilot project through the Kawan Iskandar Malaysia Program (KIM), not only to attract tourists but also to preserve the Malay traditional heritage.





- Kampung Sungai Melayu is also famous for its mussel fishing and breeding activities, small and medium industrial enterprises (SMEs), including belacan, dried fish and mussel -based handicrafts, which are the heart of the economic growth of the locals.
- Over the past years, nearly 4,000 tourists from more than 20 countries, including from Europe and West Asia visited the village, which now has a population density of nearly 820 people.
- They were not only amazed to see the unique flora and fauna in the village, but also the opportunity to see and take pictures of traditional fishermen catching fish and crabs as well as boat rides an unforgettable experience.
- Looking at the uniqueness of the village, it is not surprising when the state government is now working to gazette Kampung Sungai Melayu as a heritage village to enable it to become one of the main tourism hubs in Johor.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative study approach was used to explore in-depth the development of awareness, knowledge, and skills of community members in the development of community-based tourism in Sg. Melayu Ecotourism Village.

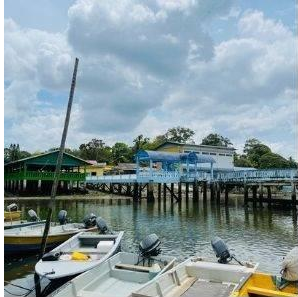
A semi-structured interview was conducted amongst 16 key informants which consist of Kg. Sg. Melayu Cooperative members who were involved in the tourism development from the beginning.

This is because the interview is an important source of information in a qualitative study (Yin, 2003). The method enables data to be generated by asking people about their experiences or opinions (Yin, 2003, Lebar, 2007).

The transcripts of the interview were analyzed by using thematic analysis.



FINDINGS & DISCUSSION





Involvement in tourism development planning

Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA) was the main agency responsible in developing Kg. Sg Melayu as a tourism destination.

In the early stages of developing community-based tourism in Kg. Sg Melayu, the process of evaluating and enhancing the community's awareness, knowledge and experience were the main focus.

The local community was directly involved in tourism development planning and what they experienced was a meaningful learning process.

At first, the lack of knowledge in the community contributed to the early development of negative perceptions of the project.

From their involvement in the tourism development planning, consciousness, knowledge and community skills were built through informal learning using an experiential learning approach.

As a result of this approach, now the tourism activity in Kg. Sg. Melayu is fully managed by the local community through Koperasi Penduduk Kg. Sg. Melayu (Kg. Sg. Melayu Residents Cooperative).

Brainstorming and Focus Group Discussions

The learning process amongst the Kg. Sg Melayu resident cooperative members happen through their involvement in the brainstorming and focus group discussion activities for the purpose of tourism development planning.

Each activity that was done was discussed in the cooperative group to enable every member to obtain the information.

Before any programme was done, the cooperative members will sit together for a discussion and planning session.

The members were educated and taught to take part in the discussion.

Mutual decisions are made and upon completion of each activity, members of the session need to present what they have learnt from the activity.

Through these group activities, many things were learnt by the members such as communication skills, self-confidence, respecting the views of members as well as teamwork.



Benchmark visit trips

A visit to other community tourism projects gave the participants a learning opportunity on how homestay programs are conducted.

Also, a visit to Lenggong, Perak exposed them to how the relationship and participation of the local authority, stakeholders and community members play an important part in sustaining community-based tourism projects.

These trips also gave them the feel of a tourist when visiting a community-based tourism destination, the likes and dislikes, and what makes the visit memorable.

These experiential learning outcomes are invaluable and help them to understand better the core of a successful community-based tourism project.



Conclusion

Experiential Learning Approach is effective in capacity building, considering the limitation of academic capabilities of the community.

From the findings of the study done in Kg. Sg. Melayu, it is evident that the experiential learning approach provides a positive outcome for rural community involvement in tourism projects.

Thank you

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